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COVER: The Light Bearer arrives to guide us through a fabulous issue of *Realms of Fantasy*. Art by Steven Assel.

ABOVE: Black Unicorn, from FPG's popular collectible card game, *Guardians*. Art by Brom, 1995. See our Gallery exploration of game and collector cards on page 68.

REALMS OF FANTASY

Fiction.~

36 THE RETURN OF THE KING

By Susan Wade and Don Webb

Since his death, mortals have mourned his passing and had visions of him in convenience stores. But the fate of the Elven prince was written on the day of his birth, man.

Departments.~

6 EDITORIAL

A guest editorial reveals the secret factor that controls which books are published.

8 LETTERS

An *ElyQuest* fan speaks and the SF vs Fantasy debate.

10 BOOKS BY GAHAN WILSON

Fabulous fables and fairy tales include ghosts, heroes, and shape-changing wizards.

18 FOLKROOTS BY TERRI WINDLING

Eastern European Magic: Alchemy, Witchery and Puppetry in Prague.

26 MOVIES BY DAN PEREZ

These are the thirteen best fantasy films you've never seen.

68 GALLERY BY JANE FRANK

Playing with a full deck of cards: There is great artistry in game and collector cards.

74 GAMES BY MARK C. SUMNER

To dice or not to dice: *Everway* and *Dragon Dice* come up with completely different answers.

82 CONTRIBUTORS

42 DIANA OF THE HUNDRED BREASTS

By Robert Silverberg

What happens when a man who believes in nothing suddenly comes face to face with...something? Can a man who has no faith lose it? A remarkable new novelette from one of the field's most celebrated authors.

52 PACIFICA

By Julie Stevens

The gods speak through whomever they wish, but it's up to the listener to determine the truth of their words.

56 DEUS TEX

By Jack McDevitt

Is there honor among thieves? Not usually, especially when one of them has pulled off the greatest heist in the history of humankind. And while the victims of the theft aren't likely to complain, the loot is another story.

60 DOLL SKULLS: A NEW TALE OF PARADIS

By Tanith Lee

Inside every cloud there lurks a silver lining. Or is it the other way around? Whichever the case, this haunting tale set in the author's magical city of Paradis will have you thinking two or three times before buying a trinket at a flea market.

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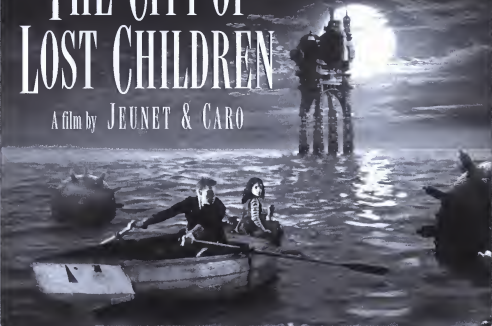
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The secret factor that controls which books are published.

MOST VORACIOUS READERS MAKE THEIR REGULAR VISITS TO THE BOOKSTORE TO visit their favorite sections, check out all the new releases, pick through the older titles, and search for new works by favorite authors. Yet most of us never stop to consider why the various publishers have chosen these particular few books, out of all the thousands of works submitted to them each year, to publish. Some of us have a vague idea that the publishers pick the "best" manuscripts to publish. But quality is not the main factor that governs a publisher's decision to publish a particular book.

Before I discuss the most important factor in a publisher's decision, let me stress that quality is a factor in every good publisher's decisions. Editors and publishers want to produce a good quality "product" just like any other manufacturer. Their job, especially in the fantasy field, is to entertain, and if their products are not entertaining, readers will get their products elsewhere.

If quality is important, then are editors simply looking for any good manuscript to publish? No. Publishers specialize in certain types of books, just like clothing stores specialize in certain styles of clothes and cater to certain types of people. A manuscript might be great, but if it doesn't fit into the type of books the publisher specializes in, then that publisher will not publish it. For example, if an author submits the best biography of Abraham Lincoln ever written to a fiction publisher, that publisher won't want to take on the book. They don't have the expertise and the contacts developed to sell this type of book; it's not where their strength lies.

The publisher does not simply publish a random collection of "good books" each month; they publish books that fit into the various categories in which they specialize. For example, *Hobbit* Publishing may publish ten paperback books a month: one lead, two fantasies, three science fiction, two romances, one mystery, one health. (The lead book is the one expected to sell the most copies and would most likely be by a best-selling author. It might be in any of the categories *Hobbit* publishes.) So you can see that if you send *Hobbit* a biography, or a Western, they're not going to be

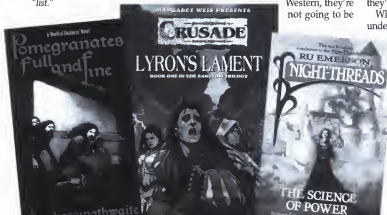
interested. This list of categories published by *Hobbit* is called their "list" (if you've ever submitted a novel to a publisher, you may have received the infamous rejection, "this manuscript is not suitable for our list at this time").

The list may be even more specific than this. For example, those two fantasies published by *Hobbit* may be broken down into one Medieval-style fantasy and one game tie-in fantasy. Similarly, the three science fiction titles per month could be one military SF, one near-future SF, and one sociological SF. If a manuscript doesn't fit into one of these categories, then chances are good it won't be published by *Hobbit*.

So why do publishers limit themselves to only certain types of books? Well, these are the books that in the past have "worked" for the publisher, meaning they've sold well and made the publisher a profit. This means the publisher knows how to publish this kind of book: they know the type of books in this category that interest and entertain the consumer, the right covers to draw attention, the best marketing techniques to spread the word to this audience. And they probably have built a good reputation with readers of this category. If a category stops being profitable, then it's eliminated from the list. *Hobbit* would constantly reevaluate its various categories and chart their sales. Categories can be added as well. If another publisher, say *Orc Books*, has great success with a Western, *Hobbit* may decide to try adding a Western category. Publishers constantly keep an eye on trends and on how the competition is doing to make sure they're not missing out on anything.

While the composition of the list is the major element underlying every decision the publisher makes, other factors influence the publisher as well. The sales of an author's previous books, the amount of money the author wants for a manuscript, the expense in production of certain books (like full color, illustrated, or very long books), and changes in the marketplace all affect publishers when they are deciding whether or not to take on a specific book. So next time you go into a bookstore and see all those shiny new releases, think about the decisions that have shaped the selection of books offered to you. And then, using your own selection process, pick the one you're going to take home with you. ♦

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Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I really love this magazine! This is only the second one I've bought, and I must say the stories and illustrations are wonderful. I also enjoy the movie and book reviews—it gives me something to look forward to. I plan to subscribe a little later, and already I look forward to the next issue. I like sci-fi, but their magazines just aren't what I've been looking for. And to think I found the October issue at a gas station. It just sorta stood out among the rest as I got ready to buy an ice cream.

Thanks for such a good mag.
Laura Boggs

Personally, I think you should subscribe right now—who knows if the next gas station will have such high standards?

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

It was with some delight that I saw Terri Windling's "Welsh Folktales" column in your December issue. Welsh folklore is an area in which I have some expertise and about which I am always glad to learn more. Sadly Ms. Windling's essay is less than complete. She does not mention Kenneth Morris, whose *The Fates of the Princes of Dyfed* and *Book of the Three Dragons* preceded Evangeline Walton's rendition of Welsh *Mabinogi* materials and may well have started the whole movement to use Welsh materials in fantasy. Nor does she mention Nancy Bond's very fine *A String in the Harp*, which, like Garner's *The Owl Service* blends the past and the present very effectively. In addition, there is scholarship available that is not mentioned in the piece, especially Jill May's excellent *Lloyd Alexander and my own Welsh Celtic Myth in Modern Fantasy*.

Respectfully,
Dr. C. W. Sullivan III
Greenville, NC

Terri Windling replies: *Unfortunately in a column as short as Folkroots there isn't room to cite all the wonderful books and sources available on a particular topic. The books Professor Sullivan recommends are indeed excellent, and I heartily second his choices.*

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

First I would like to say that I really enjoy your magazine: the stories, articles, everything! Now, here is a request of mine. Please, please, please think about printing an article on the comic book *ElfQuest*! It is one of the best fantasy epics I have ever read. I think, actually I know, that most everyone who can appreciate a good fantasy story will agree with me on this. Also, a movie is being released based on *ElfQuest* next year. If you do not plan on printing anything on the

comic or the movie, I will be devastated. Now, you are probably wondering where on earth you can find out more about *ElfQuest*. Well, the publisher, Richard Pini, is on-line at RPini@aol.com...so I beg you, please E-mail him and think about writing something on *ElfQuest*! Thank you!

Via the Internet
Sender Unknown

Well, gosh, after a letter like that, I don't think I need to run anything on ElfQuest, do you? Seriously, though, perhaps someday we'll take a look at the ElfQuest phenomenon. No promises, though.

Dear Shawna,

I really like the range of stories that you publish — like you said in your editorial (I think), there's a lot more to fantasy than dragons and swords. Thanks for showing it to me. I do have to wonder, though, about the Robert Charles Wilson story in the December issue. It was a terrific story — don't get me wrong — I really loved it, and it gave me a lot to think about. But wasn't it more SF than fantasy? Just asking.

Steven DeYoung
Larksville, OH

Well, I suppose if you want to be picky about it, you could legitimately classify it as SF, but if you did, then you'd have to throw in Lovecraft too, and I don't think he'd be happy in there. I think the author combined the elements of SF, fantasy, and horror into a truly effective mix, and so I figured if it's one third each, then two thirds of it qualify for the magazine. Plus I think it's a great story, and would have grasped at any straw that would allow me to publish it.

Dear Shawna,

So who won that short story contest? Will you publish the winning story soon?

Joseph Wells
Columbia, MD

First of all, that editorial was sort of a joke. There is no contest, really. What I was trying to get across (not too successfully, I guess—I've had several letters just like yours) was that every story I publish is, in effect, a "contest winner." It has been selected from thousands of others, and the author is paid real money and the story is printed in a national magazine. These are the "prizes" that short story contests offer, but I, and every other fiction magazine, do it every issue. So every story you read in here is a "prize winner."

Your letters and comments are welcome. Make sure you mark them as letters or they're likely to get mixed in with writer's guidelines requests. Send them to: Letters to the Editor, Realms of Fantasy, P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. Or better yet, E-mail: s.mccarthy@genie.geis.com.

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NUMBER 3

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YOU KNOW YOU'VE BEEN DOING A REVIEW COLUMN FOR SOME TIME WHEN YOU DISCOVER yourself taking up a new book by an author previously praised, and it's a pleasant sensation when the book turns out to be as solid or even better than the previous one. Such is happily the case with Jack Cady's *The Off Season* (St. Martin's Press, N.Y. 304 pp., Hardcover, \$23.95). It takes place in the generally fog-shrouded little village of Point Vestal, which sits on the edge of the vast Pacific, peering out at it from the shore of the state of Washington.

By the way, it has always struck me as peculiar that there is only a single, solitary state in the whole of North America named after one of its presidents. Of course the Eastern states weren't likely to be for historical reasons, though when we created the District of Columbia to house our nation's capital we did manage to name it after the same fellow. We have not shown any sign of hesitation in naming our other important fixed objects after different presidents. Many streets and avenues and boulevards are named after Washington, but plenty of others proudly bear the names of such as Harding, Roosevelt, Jackson, and the like. I have a Madison Street within a stone's throw of me. The same goes for state capitals, colleges, parks, squares, and financial institutions. Ah, well — just a thought in passing. Back to Mr. Cady's excellent book.

Point Vestal has a rich and varied history, speaking of

dead presidents, but, unlike most communities, that history refuses to stay in the past. Chinese workers drowned by smugglers in the bad old days bob up from the water and shuffle crankily along the streets in their dripping black pajamas suits; bygone whores and less reputable ghosts still ply their trade in apartments above places of more respectable businesses on the main street so commonly and blatantly that the locals have long formed the habit of not looking into second story windows; murderous gangsters of yore can still be surprised in the strange and awful acts which they committed long ago. And, to make the confusion worse, Point Vestal ghosts are not your usual filmy, floating things, but are solid and feasible entities who are only given away then by the occasional flicker.

The Off Season is an extended eavesdropping on a likeable group of Point Vestians who have joined themselves in an effort to put down an account of recent events in their town both to ensure the record is set straight and to attempt to explain why this small, rain-plagued little spot became the locale and focus of a titanic struggle between the forces of good and evil.

But be not afeared, if that last bit seems a little heavy and highfaluting, know that *Off Season's* approach to the cosmic struggle it presents is far from stuffy.

To put the reader on the right track as to how to approach his fable, Cady starts off the book with a lovely quote from Mark Twain's "Jumping Frog":

"...which showed me plainly that, so far from his imagining that there was anything ridiculous or funny about his story, he regarded it as a really important matter..." and then Cady goes on to express the hope, with what strikes me as genuine humility, that *The Off Season* might be a novel that "my hero Mark Twain would enjoy reading."

There are a quantity of heroes in the book—Cady fully understands that one of the most important aspects of any successful contention with large-scale villainy must involve the willing joining of many good hearts—but there is no doubt the most important hero is Joel Andrew, a once Episcopalian priest who, driven from the church for his oddities, finds himself a wanderer on this earth and a witness to various nastinesses which are spared religious leaders comfortably ensconced within the bourgeoisie.

Lilith, the Shape-Changer's Wife, charms a student wizard with her fascinating hypnotic eyes. Art by Dorian Vallejo.



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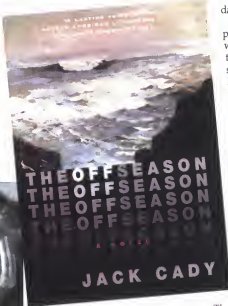
MERLIN'S CRYSTAL BALL

After a pivotal revelation via exposure to stark misery in a San Francisco alley, Joel-Andrew takes a deep breath and sets himself on an extended Northwards walk up the long coast of California and right on through into the aforementioned state of Washington, bearing with him his violin and accompanied by his most likeable, but remarkably strange cat, Obed.

Obed is an extremely interesting character and has no problem at all holding his own with the humans in the book. He has an astounding facility with languages and owns many other talents not commonly encountered in ordinary felines. With a lesser author, creatures along the lines of Obed often degenerate into whimsically cloying little wimps, but Obed emerges feisty and formidable from Cady's pen. Though he can admittedly be a bit spooky and now and then even downright alarming, he is ever a good little friend, and all cat. I'd love to have him around.

There is only one main villain and although his name is legion, it is also August Starling. He seems a very youthful and appealingly impish fellow, but he is totally black of heart and wishes no good for any human, past or present, ghost or living.

At the very start of the book we are given a marvelously sinister introduction to Starling with a description of an event which



Jack Cady

took place in 1888 (the year of Jack the Ripper's deadly doings, as I'm sure Mister Cady knows) which very nicely sets his tone: "...when the Starling House stood brand-new and smelling of fresh paint, August Starling was discovered in full evening dress, dancing to the tinkling music of an Austrian music box. His partner wore a plain but lovely long gown, which was not shocking, nor reason for fear. But some people were distressed, others thrilled, because she was dead. Starling

danced with a corpse."

The Off Season is a fine fabulous fable packed with marvelous events and wonders and full of wise and helpful teachings. It will entertain you handsomely, encourage you to be brave, and hand you a large number of laughs. I think Mark Twain would have enjoyed it very much.

***The Shape-Changer's Wife*, by Sharon Shinn, Ace Books, NY, 200 pp., Paperback, \$4.99.**

I confess I am not familiar with any other works of Sharon Shinn and that it was an enthusiastic cover blurb by Peter Beagle which caused me to settle back in a temporary, tentative sort of way with the first page or so of *The Shape Changer*, but then the flow of those pages pulled me into the next chapter, which pulled me on into the one after that, and before you knew it, as if by magic, I had finished the whole book.

The Shape-Changer is an unabashed fairy tale which dives right into the fairyland sea without any coy dabbling of toes into the frothy fairyland surf. A fine young student wizard, Aubrey, who we somehow know is as straightforward as presented and will not go tricky on us, is sent with the blessings (and warnings) of his original teacher-wizard (the goody old Cynril) to study the art of changemages with another wizard (Glyrenden [nice name, that!], of a dark and highly iffy reputation, who is the acknowledged master in the field of turning one thing into another, will it or no.

When he arrives at Glyrenden's weird and tottery castle, hidden deep in a strange, mysterious wood, and in quick succession encounters a scuttery, spiderlike maid (Arachne); a hulking, hairy hunter-servant who speaks mainly in brutish grunts (Orion), and an oddly fascinating, willowy woman (Lilith, the shape-changer's wife) whose large, green, hypnotic eyes charm him utterly from his first look into them. Even though he may not be clearly aware of it at the start, I began to hear tiny little alarm bells go off in my head.

"Does this all seem rather like a Roger Corman movie?" I asked myself a little nervously, and quickly answered, "Yes."

But then, fortunately, one of my other selves stepped out of some dark corner in me (I have any number of other selves and dark corners about) and spoke up.

"What's so bad about Roger Corman?" it jauntily asked, and then added: "Besides, there aren't any alarm bells going off in your head; it's only a figure of speech."

So I relaxed, and as I allowed Ms. Shinn to continue weaving her time-mellowed, fairyland spells upon me, each following page showed I had made the right decision. I had put myself in the hands of one who has studied her dark art well and become deft at lead-

Books to Look For

The Overlook Film Encyclopedias, Science Fiction, Horror, Western, edited by Phil Hardy, Overlook Press, Paperback, \$40.00 each. If, like most fans of genre fiction, you are a completist and a bit of a fanatic, you'll find these magnificent compendiums irreplaceable. Each volume is beautifully produced and meticulously researched, and every fan of filmed SF, horror, and Westerns should add them to their library.

The Spirit Gate, by Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff, Baen, Paperback, \$5.99. If you're a Mercedes Lackey fan, the publisher thinks this will be your kind of story—a young woman must study witchcraft in order to improve her life, but she is unwittingly drawn into a web of scandal, deceit, and betrayal which may cost her her own life and that of her son.

The First King of Shannara, by Terry Brooks, Del Rey, Hardcover \$23.50. A brand new tale of Shannara by best-selling author Terry Brooks. This is sure to be a big hit with his legions of fans.

Dagger Magic: A novel of the Adept, by Katherine Kurtz and Deborah Turner Harris, Ace, Paper, \$5.99. Katherine Kurtz is known and loved for her Deryni series, and the Adept line is every bit as interesting.

Tricky Logic Puzzles, by Norman D. Willis, Sterling Publishing. Here's a way to challenge your kids—or yourself—to think logically without ever having to leave the 'Realms of Fantasy.' This is a compendium of logic puzzles of the sort in which one dragon always tells the truth and the other doesn't. I happen to enjoy this sort of game, though they make many others pull their hair out. If you belong to the former category, this book should offer many hours of frustrating diversion.

Parrish & Poetry, A Gift of Words and Art, Pomegranate Press, Hardcover, \$19.95. While not exactly fantasy, the gorgeous illustrations of Maxfield Parrish have always entranced readers of the genre. The editors have matched each illustration with an appropriate poem for an enchanting and beautifully produced volume.



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ing minds ever deeper into dreaming by means of classic chants and proven pentagrams.

Therefore, if you feel like spending a few hours in genuine fairyland territory I suggest you do as I did and let Ms. Shinn have her way with you and your mind. Allow her to slowly and expertly reveal the depths of Glyrenden's evil (it really is a pity Vincent Price couldn't have played him; he would have had so much fun with the part) and permit her to present her puzzle-charms, tease you with them, then conjure up their explanations.

You might also make note of her solidly practical hints concerning faery doings such as that if you opt to change your form into that of a gigantic wolf, you will likely find it easier to lope if you tie your pack to your belly rather than to your back. You never know—one day you may find that one little tip, all by itself, will turn out to be worth the whole price of the book!

Cthulhu 2000, edited by Jim Turner, Arkham House, WI, 413 pp., Hardcover, \$24.95.

Fifty-six years ago, an incongruous duo of authors, August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, the first an enthusiastic and outgoing entrepreneur, the second a shy introvert swiftly becoming an almost total hermit, both mostly known for their work in the sensational pulp magazines of that era, scraped together just enough money to bring out a book housing a collection of stories written by another pulp author, Howard Phillips Lovecraft, who they admired greatly and who had died in obscurity almost as great as their own only two years before.

The book was *The Outsider and Others* and though it was a slow starter in spite of its modest \$5.00 price, the power of the writings it contained and the dogged and continuing salesmanship of August Derleth led to a slow building of the highly deserved fame and recognition which the work of Lovecraft presently enjoys.

Derleth and Wandrei named the publishing establishment they'd built to bring all this about "Arkham House" after the witchy New England town created by Lovecraft and used it not only to further champion H.P.L., but to help the cause of other heretofore insufficiently appreciated authors of the fantastic and macabre such as Clark Ashton Smith, Robert E. Howard, and a multitude of others.

Life being the complicated thing it is, there is really no way to accurately assess the contribution Arkham House has made to advance the availability and appreciation of fantasy literature, but anyone even slightly familiar with the field must admit it is surely enormous and that all of us who love the sort of work which appears within the pages of this magazine are very deeply in debt to Derleth and Wandrei's marvelous creation.

The present editor and publisher of Arkham House is Jim Turner, and he has

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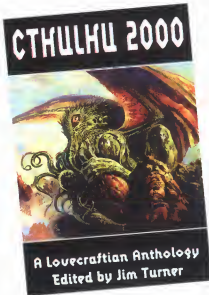
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done an excellent job of carrying on its noble tradition of the discovery and support of authors of the fantastic and macabre and their work. A book just out, *Cthulhu 2000*, is a good example of this kind of rescue operation as Turner has combed through I've no idea how many out-of-print anthologies and old magazines in order to assemble a highly entertaining collection of stories by a wide range of authors which are all loving tributes to Lovecraft and to the wonderfully creepy world he created.

All sorts of approaches are taken from the ridiculous, and quite hilarious "Love's Eldritch Horror" by Esther M. Friesner, to the sublime, which is solidly represented by Roger Zelazny's "24 Views of Mt. Fuji, By Hokusai." If Mr. Turner had not come across these two beauties I would never have had the pleasure of reading them, nor would I have enjoyed a marvelously awful and eerie Innsmouthian tale by John P. Baylock, "The Shadow on the Doorstep," or the very gruesomely shaggothy "Fat Face" by Michael Shea or the neatly dislocating "The Unthinkable" by Bruce Sterling.

There are a number of highly impressive star turns including those of F. Paul Wilson, Poppy Z. Brite, Ramsey Campbell, and Harlan Ellison which you may have come across if you're very well read, and there is T. E. D. Kline's absolutely brilliant "Black Man With A Horn" which cannot be read enough. There is even a story by me, and if you think



I'm not proud to be lurking in *Cthulhu 2000*, you've got another think coming.

So long as I'm on the topic of dear old Arkham House I'd like to mention *Miscellaneous Writings* by H. P. Lovecraft and edited by S. T. Joshi (hardcover, \$29.95). It is decidedly by the advanced devotee, being a gathering of obscure and rarefied items from the attic and basement of H.P.L.'s writing career

since it includes very, very early juvenalia, essays philosophical, political, and highly personal, and all sorts of what the less zealous student might consider trivia. To the true Lovecraftian they are, of course, pure gold and not to be missed. I recommend this collection to all Lovecraft obsessives unreservedly.

S. T. Joshi is decidedly the man to have assembled this gathering of marginalia as he is absolutely dedicated to Lovecraft and has essentially turned his life over to him. I think one of the most wistful things I ever read was in some essay by Joshi on little quirks and habits of H.P.L., in which he, Joshi, confessed to being saddened because he had attempted to shift from tea, his caffeine of choice, to the sort of strong, heavily sweetened coffee such as Lovecraft consumed nightly by the quart. The poor fellow clearly viewed it as a disheartening personal failure when his palate firmly balked at the switch.

Gahan Wilson

The Merlin Chronicles edited by Mike Ashley, Carroll C. Graf, NY, 464 pp., Paperback, \$12.95.

The character of Merlin has fascinated man since the appearance of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophecies of Merlin* in 1134 and even before. As part of the Arthurian legend, he has been one of the most written-about char-

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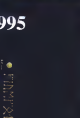
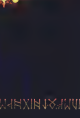
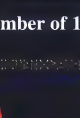
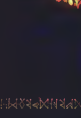
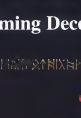
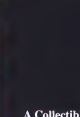
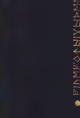
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Eastern European Magic: Alchemy, Witchery and Puppetry in Prague.

A GOTHIC FOOTBRIDGE MADE OF STONE SPANS THE BROAD VLTAVA RIVER, LINKING FIVE ancient towns together in Prague, the hauntingly beautiful capital city of the Czech Republic. West of the bridge is the Old Town; to the east is Mala Strana (the Little Quarter), a collection of crooked cobbled streets between the river and the castle on the hill. Strolling across Charles Bridge at twilight, the "City of One Hundred Spires" looks distinctly unreal, as dreamlike and hallucinatory as any of the art it has inspired. This is Franz Kafka's city, after all. A town where nothing is quite as it appears. A town steeped in legends and alchemy, with a long, bizarre, rather tragic history. Where the past is tangible, crowding the present-day streets with ghosts and stories.

The apartment where I am staying is in Mala Strana, tucked between crumbling Baroque buildings, quiet parks, and the bubbling Devil's Stream—named, I am told, for a demon in the water, or else for a washer-

woman's temper. I have come because of the Art Nouveau movement which blossomed here one hundred years before. With its roots deeply planted in Czech folklore, Art Nouveau architecture and design has turned Prague into a fantasist's dream: extravagantly adorned with sprites, undines, and the pensive heroes of myth and legend, standing draped over doorways, on turret towers, holding up the red-tile roofs. Stories surround me everywhere I look. Music, too, is a constant presence. The sound of Mozart on a solo violin follows me down a dusky alleyway. I glimpse the form of the young musician in a lit window on a floor above. On the next block, I hear piano scales; and down the street, the strains of a string quartet from a small palace concert hall. The night air is crisp, cold, the last of autumn shading into winter.

The friends I am visiting here in Prague are involved in a world of magic themselves. Todd Jones is a Welsh puppeteer at work on a film about Pinocchio. The film crew, directed by Steve Barron, has made use of these old, unspoiled streets to recreate the timeless landscape of a classic children's story. Although ostensibly set in Italy, Carlo Collodi's tale of a wooden puppet who longs to be a real boy is a fitting one to bring to Prague—and not just because of the economic climate that lures so many film productions here. This is a city filled with puppets: from the simplest wooden marionettes hawked by street vendors on Charles Bridge to the elaborate, fanciful figures found on display in posh art galleries. This ancient folk art/folk theater tradition still flourishes here in Eastern Europe in a way unimaginable in the West—where puppetry, like fantasy itself, is deemed to be for children only.

Czech puppets often depict the figures from old Bohemian folk tales, a rich oral storytelling tradition that dates back to the founding of this land. According to the history books, the Czech tribe established itself in Bohemia sometime between the fifth and eighth centuries, following a vanished Celtic tribe, and one of Germanic peoples. The Premysls were the first ruling dynasty, founded by the Queen Libuse—a romantic, half-legendary figure described by Cosmas of Prague (c. 1045-1125) as "...a wonderful woman among women, chaste in body, righteous in all her morals, second to none as a judge over the people, affable to all and even amiable, the pride and glory of the female sex, doing wise and manly deeds; but, as nobody is perfect, this so

Alphonse Mucha was one of the best-known Czech artists. His idealized women (below, Reverie, 1896) and extraordinary designs made his name synonymous with Art Nouveau.



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poise-worthy woman was, alas, a soothsayer...."

When the men of her tribe grew disgruntled about being ruled by a woman, she fell into a trance, pointed toward the hills, and instructed them to follow her horse; it would lead them to the simple ploughman who was destined to be her husband. That ploughman was the first Premysls, a muscular and handsome young man according to the legends—and to the many statues of the pair one finds in Prague today. Another legend attributes the founding of the city itself to Libuse's visions. In a trance she saw two golden olive trees and "a town, the glory of which will reach the stars." The spot described by the queen was found, and on it was a man building a doorsill for his cottage. The Czech word for doorsill is *prah*, giving Libuse's new town its name: *Praha* (Prague). The town was then erected on the hill where Prague Castle stands today.

The Premysls' rule over Bohemia lasted well into the Middle Ages. Prague thrived, and by the 14th century, under the rule of Charles IV, the city was larger than London or Paris and boasted Western Europe's first university. But religious strife between vari-

ous Christian faiths presented serious ongoing problems, resulting in many bloody massacres, assassinations, and executions. A series of weak absentee kings further damaged the independent kingdom until, in the 16th century, the Austrian Habsburgs claimed the throne. German became the official court language as tiny Bohemia was swallowed up by the Holy Roman Empire.

In 1583, the Emperor Rudolph II moved his capital from Vienna to Prague. Rudolph was an unusual man: an intellectual and a mystic, reputed to be mentally unhinged (he walked around with the fingers of a dead man stuffed in his back pocket). Rudolphine Prague was glittering and surreal, a city teeming with alchemists, astrologists, necromancers, sooth-sayers, artists, musicians, brilliant mathematicians, and religious zealots of every stripe and color. The search for the "Philosopher's Stone" ("the stone which is not a stone, a precious thing which has no value, a thing of many shapes, this unknown which is most known of all," according to the alchemist Hermes Trismegistus) consumed Rudolph and his court, and indeed much of Prague nobility.

Despite continued religious strife, the Hab-

sburg Austro-Hungarian rule did not weaken until the 19th century. Then the Czech language, which had all but died out, was revived by a handful of writers and language scholars. A wave of nationalism swept the country, and a strong desire for Slav self-rule. In the arts, this translated into a passion for the history, myths, and folklore of Bohemia. The national operas of Bedrich Smetana drew upon rustic traditional stories, and the symphonies of Antonin Dvorak were influenced by Slav folk music. Art nouveau was a 19th century movement that came to Prague via Paris and Vienna. In architecture, the style was distinguished by the abundant use of decorative elements drawn from sensual, natural forms: vines and lilies, sunflowers, poppies, and the shapes of the human body. Czech artists used this fluid style to cover the faces of new buildings with figures drawn from Slav folklore, creating some of the finest examples of Art Nouveau to be found anywhere in Europe. A huge slum clearance in the old Jewish Quarter led to many new buildings in the Art Nouveau style—buildings miraculously preserved despite the ravages of two world wars.

The most famous Czech Art Nouveau artist was not an architect, but a graphic designer: Alphonse Mucha, whose theater posters for the actress Sara Bernhardt catapulted him into sudden fame. In Paris between 1890 and 1910, his posters, prints, even jewelry designs, were ubiquitous in fashionable circles—standing the test of time with their great popularity to this day. Although Mucha's distinctive work has come to exemplify the Art Nouveau style, he himself hated the term, insisting that art could never be "new" because it was eternal. A fiercely nationalistic man, literate, and prone to mystic leanings, Mucha himself was most proud of the work completed upon his return to Prague: the Slav Epic, comprised of twenty large panels in tempera and oil paint. Commissioned for Prague's Municipal Building, an Art Nouveau masterpiece itself, these gorgeous paintings illustrate Slav history and legend in rich detail. Mucha spent his later years in Prague, watching his dream of national independence turn to reality in 1918, when the Czechs paired with neighboring Slovakia to establish their own republic. Twenty years later that dream crumbled as Hitler's army rolled into the city. Mucha was one of the first of the nationalist intellectuals to be grilled by the Gestapo. Already in poor health, the artist died three months later, a broken man.

A lesser known, but equally interesting Czech artist is Frantisek Bielek, who brought Art Nouveau ideas back to Prague after studying in Paris in the 1890s. Bielek was an intelligent, iconoclastic, and wildly inventive man, a sculptor and designer who worked with an astonishing variety of materials. Like Mucha, he had a strong mystical bent, and a passion for Czech history and lore. His art

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extraordinary peaceful uprising, known as "The Velvet Revolution," toppled the old communist regime, and in less than two months playwright Vaclav Havel was elected to the presidency.

Since then, Czech and Slovakia have formed two separate nations. Prague has opened its doors to the West and called home its many exiles. The city's beauty, mystique, and cheap rents have attracted a large English-speaking community, many of them writers, artists, and filmmakers hoping to find, or recreate, the "café life" of Europe between the wars. At sidewalk cafés and in coffee bars one sees many young faces these days and hears many different languages spoken. Some Czechs are delighted with this new infusion of young energy, others are dismayed by the tourist invasion. But despite the crowds in Old Town Square and around the other tourist attractions, the real life of Prague goes on in the back streets of the city—in the casual and unmarked beer halls which one discovers only with the aid of Czech friends, in the art studios, theaters, and jazz clubs tucked away on unlikely streets, where the Czech exercise their hard-won right to gather, to argue, and to create.

In recent years, Hollywood in particular has discovered the charms of Eastern Europe, with its economical labor pool and a wealth of exotic locations: from castles to countryside. My friend's film, *Pinocchio*, has been shot in Prague's back streets,

on its rooftops, in a quarry, and in a small Czech village. Now they are doing blue-screen shots in the large film studio on the outskirts of town, the painstaking work that will make the wooden puppet come to life on film. It is fascinating to watch Todd and the others at work manipulating the puppet. It takes several puppeteers working together to move, in coordination, the legs, the arms, the torso, the head, and all the facial movements that give the puppet expression. Todd wears what looks like a blue diving suit so that he can be eliminated from the picture, leaving behind only the image of the wooden puppet in motion. It is an unusual and highly skilled form of acting—physical, even acrobatic. A good team seems to work together as if by magic or telepathy.

At a break in the filming, the director, Steve Barron, talks about *Pinocchio* with me. It is, he says, a tale that he has long wanted to film. He has an abiding love for fantasy stories, particularly ones grounded in the world we know. Steve directed the *Storyteller* series (created with Jim Henson, of *Muppet* fame), filming beautiful and intelligent re-tellings of lesser known fairy tales, such as the quirky *Hans My Hedgehog*. What drew him to *Pinocchio* was the human emotion lodged within Collodi's magical adventure tale: the wooden boy who longs to be like the other boys, to be real, to fit in. That deep desire to belong, Steve says with a smile, is a feeling he remembers well.

Carlo Collodi was an Italian journalist who became a popular writer of children's stories. He first published "Pinocchio" in an episodic, serial form; it was then gathered together as a single book in 1883. Since then, the story has been filmed several times, but never (in America) quite successfully. The Disney version in particular lacks the original story's sinister edge that makes the ultimate reunion between the puppet and his father so affecting. Like Steve, Mac Wilson (the head puppeteer) says it is a story he has long wanted to film, the ultimate story for a puppeteer. And a technically challenging one, for the puppet is on-screen for a great deal of the movie. The task of Mac's team of puppeteers is to show how a bit of carved and painted wood can be turned into a living, breathing character whom an audience will come to love.

It seems fitting that they must accomplish this here, in the ancient land of Bohemia, where puppet-makers have been bringing such creatures to life for centuries. The folk tales of Bohemia are full of creatures carved from trees: male and female, painted, then dressed, then brought to life by the power of speech. One becomes a ravenous child, eating everything in sight, his parents, his village, the countryside, until he's finally destroyed. Another is a girl, ravishing but mute, who is wed to a prince and then turns back into wood in his arms on their wedding night. Creation, destruction, illusion...



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reminding us that all is not as it appears.... Since the revolution, fantasy and Surrealism is catching up with Social Realism as a vibrant presence in Czech arts today. Adolf Born is an artist whose phantasmagorical paintings could almost be children's book illustrations but for the macabre, perversely erotic elements of his imagery. Jiri Anderle is a master of delicate, surreal pencil drawings. The collection of his art with text by Vaclav Havel is particularly worth seeking out. Peter Sis is a Czech painter, filmmaker, and children's book author now living in New York. *The Three Golden Keys* is a gorgeous, dreamlike picture book about his home city of Prague, created for his young daughter who was born in America. The book captures the beauty and melancholy of the old city streets; it is an intimate and haunting work which I strongly recommend. For those interested in Czech folklore, K.J. Erben's *Tales from Bohemia* is a particularly nice collection, reprinted from the original Prague edition with lovely illustrations by Artus Scheiner.

One Prague critic has decried the recent popularity of "works of mere escapism" — like J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, and home-grown Czech magical works. Yet it is not surprising that after years of force-fed realism, readers might discover the pleasures to be found in a more fanciful form of storytelling, one that works on two levels at once: not only as a magical "escape," but also as a metaphorical evocation of real life. Tolkien's tale is a bittersweet one of war, and heroism, and loss. Sauron's dark hold on Middle Earth, and the terror of his Dark Riders, must have a particular resonance for those who saw the Prague Spring crushed, and watched police attack young people armed only with flowers.

This is a county where the old and the new, the realistic and surrealistic, have come together in a singular manner—in its arts, its streets, its politics, its way of life, and its stories. Its capital city is contemporary, vital, and full of promise; yet ancient blood still stains the stones and ancient ghosts still haunt the roads: the innocent women burned as witches, the religious martyrs thrown from the towers, the men and women executed for the wrong faith, the wrong name, the wrong ideas. I have never been in a place where so much history seems crowded together, packed into the few square miles overlooked by old Prague Castle.

On my last night in Prague, I pass through the city riding on the back of my friend's motorcycle, the sleek machine passing over the old cobblestones, slippery with rain. The old and the new flash past us as we speed across the river and down the streets of Mala Strana. The ghosts of the past are still whispering their tales: folk tales, fairy tale, history, and legend. But I'm back in the modern world now. I'm moving too fast to listen. ♦

Many thanks to Todd Jones and Carol Amos for their hospitality; and to Steve Barron for graciously allowing me on the Pinocchio set.

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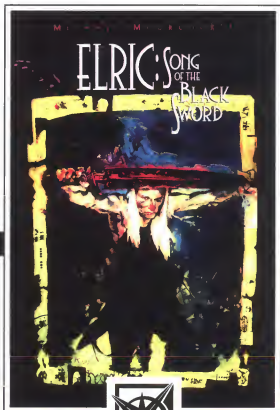
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THIS ARTICLE ORIGINALLY STARTED OUT AS A SURVEY OF THE THIRTEEN BEST FANTASY films we've all seen (you know, *Wizard of Oz*, *Legend*, *The Company of Wolves*, etc.), but I quickly decided it'd be a lot more interesting to take the road less traveled and examine some fantasy films which are less well-known, and often undeservedly so.

Of course, the task of choosing the thirteen films was made more difficult by the old definitions debate: what makes a film a fantasy film, as opposed to science fiction or horror? Often movies blur the line between these genres. Is *The Company of Wolves* fantasy, horror, or both? And even when you settle on a workable definition of fantasy, where do you draw the line? Consider *Sunset Boulevard*. Most people would be quick to say that this movie isn't fantasy. On the other hand, it is narrated throughout by a dead man after his murder (Billy Wilder scrapped the original sequence in which the William Holden character sits up on the slab at the morgue and starts telling the story). Finally, how do you choose the best thirteen movies out there?

I decided on a few criteria. First and foremost I

wanted to find films that are currently available for video rental (*Chinese Ghost Story* lost out here—while it can be purchased, usually by mail order, it's not easily found for rental). I've avoided movies which depend on technology as a plot engine (like *The Quiet Earth*) as too science fictional. I've made judgment calls about drawing the line between horror, science fiction, and fantasy. Lastly, I decided to include a few films that stretched the boundaries of the fantastic.

So here they are: thirteen fantasy films that will amuse, delight, and challenge. They should all be seen more often than they are.

Beauty and the Beast (1946, 95 minutes, black and white), also known as *Belle et la Bête*, is Jean Cocteau's dreamy, gorgeous adaptation of the classic fairy tale. A magic spell enchants the castle in which the lovely Belle (Josette Day), come to save her father, encounters the hirsute, fanged Beast (expressively played by Jean Marais). Fantastic sets include disembodied arms bearing candelabra and pouring wine. The movie contains many unforgettable images, chief of which is when the Beast turns his all-too-human eyes toward Belle.

In addition to the Beast, Marais portrayed Belle's suitor back in the village, and the prince who is restored when the magic spell is broken.

Black Orpheus (1959, 103 minutes, color) is another little-seen Oscar winner (again, for Best Foreign Language Film). It's a modern-day version of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, set against the vibrant backdrop of Rio de Janeiro during Carnival. Orpheus (Breno Mello) is a streetcar conductor whose guitar and song make the sun rise, and Eurydice (Marpessa Dawn) is his beautiful, doomed lover who will dance in the Carnival parade, under Death's watchful gaze. The rhythmic beat of samba drums is the hypnotic pulse of this movie, present in nearly every frame until Orpheus seeks Eurydice in the symbolic underworld of a Brazilian hospital complex. Directed by Marcel Camus.

The eerie visual beauty and surrealistic atmosphere of Jean Cocteau's *French Beauty* and the Beast make it a fantasy classic.



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The Devil and Daniel Webster (1941, 85 minutes, black and white) was also released as *Daniel and the Devil* and *All That Money Can Buy*, but by any name, it's a superb adaptation of Stephen Vincent Benet's classic story. Walter Huston (*The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*) sparkles with malevolent glee as Mr. Scratch, a.k.a. the Devil, on the loose in rural 1840's New Hampshire. He strikes a deal for the soul of a down-on-his-luck farmer (James Craig), but when it's time to collect, the repentant farmer seeks out statesman and attorney Daniel Webster (Edward Arnold) to save him. Webster risks his own soul to convince Scratch that a trial by jury is the proper way to settle the matter. The catch, of course, is that Scratch gets to select the members of the jury.

Arnold makes a perfect foil for Huston, and there's never a false note in the movie, right down to the Oscar-winning score by the great Bernard Herrmann. Watch for Simone Simon's unsettling turn as a diabolically beautiful housekeeper. A 107-minute laserdisk version is available. Directed by William Dieterle.

Dreamchild (1985, 94 minutes, color) follows Alice Hargreaves, the woman who, as a girl, inspired Reverend Charles Dodgson to write (as Lewis Carroll) the *Alice in Wonderland* stories. Now 80, she journeys to America in 1932 to be honored during Carroll's centenary celebration. But the elder Alice (played wonderfully by Coral Browne)



Disney's 1985 *Return to Oz* is much more like the original books than the famous Judy Garland film.

is haunted by visions of Dodgson's creations (and frightening visions they are, thanks to Jim Henson's Creature Shop), and by her childhood memories of Dodgson (Ian Holm, in a typically good performance) himself.

This movie treads on some difficult ground (Dodgson's obvious love for little Alice) with sensibility and restraint and skillfully illuminates the down side of unwanted celebrity. The fantasy sequences are memo-

rable, thanks to Henson's wizardry. Directed by Gavin Millar.

The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T (1953, 88 minutes, color) sounds like a horror film, but is actually an oddball, live-action musical from the fertile mind of Theodore Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss. Don't be put off by finding this amongst the children's videos; there's plenty here to tickle adult sensibilities, as well.

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Jean Marais keeps the budget low as he plays the Beast, Belle's village suitor, and the post-spell prince.

Tommy Rettig plays Bartholomew Collins (not Cubbins), a boy whose piano lessons, administered by Dr. Terwilliker (Hans Conried), are snooze-inducing. While asleep, he dreams he is held prisoner in the silly-sinister Terwilliker Institute, where he and 499 other boys will be forced to play a gigantic, double-decker piano for the tyrannical doctor. Plucky Bart must devise a way to escape, while rescuing his mother (Mary Healy),

who is held in hypnotic, administrative thrall by Terwilliker. The boy is aided by a reluctant plumber played by Peter Lind Hayes.

Even if you're not a fan of Dr. Seuss (!), you'll be captivated by the marvelous, amusing sets and costumes (look for the great leatherbound books on musical notes in Terwilliker's sleeping chamber), and by a show-stopping production number featuring musicians playing typically Seussian instru-

ments. Some of the songs, alas, are almost as sleep-inducing as little Bart's piano lessons, but the movie overall has an eccentric, irresistible charm. Directed by Roy Rowland.

Heavenly Creatures (1995, 99 minutes, color) is a surprise, coming as it does from director Peter Jackson, whose previous film was the spectacular gore comedy *Dead Alive*. *Heavenly Creatures* is based on a true story of two girls who invent a fantasy world called "the Fourth World," which becomes an escape from the tedium and unhappiness of their lives in 1950s New Zealand. But it also becomes an unhealthy obsession, eventually spiraling into a murder plot.

Jackson concocts some wry moments of social satire (such as when a psychologist can barely get out the word "homosexual") and a flawless period feel for the film. As the tortured, delusional teens, Melanie Lynskey and Kate Winslet are terrific.

Here Comes Mr. Jordan (1941, 93 minutes, black and white) is Alexander Hall's engaging story about Joe Pendleton (Robert Montgomery), professional prizefighter and amateur saxophonist who is mistakenly claimed by a bumbling angel (Edward Everett Horton) after a plane crash. Claude Rains plays Mr. Jordan, who returns Joe to Earth in a new body, and supervises his readjustment.

Charming on nearly every level, *Here Comes Mr. Jordan* won two Oscars (for Best Original Story and Best Screenplay), but has been eclipsed by the competent 1978

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remake *Heaven Can Wait*, with Warren Beatty and Julie Christie. You've seen the latter, most likely, so check out the original. You won't be disappointed.

The Magic Flute (1974, 134 minutes, color) is the Mozart opera (complete with dragons, trips through the underworld, and the titular enchanted instrument), as filmed by the great Ingmar Bergman. Is there any doubt you're getting a double dose of culture here? Still, it's sweet-tasting as Bergman playfully presents a glowing rendition of the opera itself, in the style of 18th century productions, and a clever examination of the nature of theatrical "reality" as well. As the overture plays, you'll be sitting in your living room watching the people who are watching the opera. Who is *really* the audience here? Bergman is asking. Then, as the play begins, you'll quickly realize that Bergman ignores the hallowed boundaries and conventions of the stage in ways that only a filmmaker can, creating an intriguing fusion between the visual arts of theater and film. And Bergman masterfully pulls all this off without interrupting the narrative flow of Mozart's magical opera. A treat.

The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey (1988, 92 minutes, color and black and white) is a haunting, gorgeous, low-budget film with an utterly captivating plot. Peasants in a 14th century mining village, terrified of the black plague, seek to fulfill the prophetic visions of a young boy. They use a siege engine to tunnel through the earth, emerging in modern-day New Zealand, where they must forge a copper cross and place it atop a cathedral before dawn breaks. If they succeed, their village will be spared the ravages of the pestilence.

It sounds like an improbable premise, but thanks to Vincent Ward's thoughtful direction and terrific performances by all the principals, you won't be able to take your eyes off the screen. An utter delight.

Paperhouse (1988, 94 minutes, color) is an engrossing tale of a young girl (Charlotte Burke) experiencing vivid, increasingly menacing dreams (some of which occur during fainting spells) which seem to be stimulated by changes she makes in a pencil-and-paper drawing. The visions seem somehow linked to another real-life person her doctor mentions: a boy dying of muscular dystrophy.

This coming-of-age story was the first feature for Bernard Rose, who had previously directed music videos. Despite being a little overlong and having a sometimes overpowering soundtrack, *Paperhouse* is poignant, frightening, and powerful.

Rashomon (1950, 88 minutes, black-and-white), despite winning an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, the Golden Lion at the Venice film festival, and being director Akira Kurosawa's first big international success, is rarely seen these days outside university film courses. A pity, since it's a powerful examination of the human condition, focusing on our need to embellish the objec-

tive truth to fit our subjective needs—in other words, the wellspring of fantasy itself.

Beneath the ruined Rashomon gate of medieval Kyoto, three men take refuge from a torrential rainstorm, and two of them relate a tale of murder and lust. After a nobleman is murdered and his wife raped, four witnesses (including the murdered husband, who speaks through a medium in an eerie scene) testify to the events that transpired, and every story is different, tailored to that particular witness's point of view. Whose version is the truth? Is any version really the truth? It's a fascinating dilemma and Kurosawa guides us through its subtleties and ambiguities with great skill. The film inspired many other movies, including two American remakes.

Return to Oz (1985, 110 minutes, color), Disney's dark, moody sequel to *The Wizard of Oz*, dismayed a lot of critics and viewers in its original release because it wasn't as bright and joyous as the first film. Too bad they couldn't meet this film on its own terms because it still brims with imagination and style.

Dorothy Gale (Fairuza Balk), haunted by memories of Oz, is sent to quack doctors by her well-meaning Aunt Em and Uncle Henry. Escaping an untherapeutic electroshock therapy session, Dorothy finds herself back in Oz, where the Emerald City lies in ruin, its inhabitants turned to stone. She meets a delightful automaton in the form of Tik Tok and they embark on a quest to liberate the Scarecrow (now ruler of Oz) from the stony clutches of the Nome King (Nicole Williamson).

Some of the best special effects work here comes from Will Vinton's claymation studio, which brings both the Nome King and his petrified minions to life. Both Williamson and Jean Marsh (Princess Mombi) play dual roles in the electroshock sanitarium. Fairuza Balk makes a fine debut as Dorothy, too. Directed by Walter Murch.

Starman (1984, 115 minutes, color). Remember when John Carpenter used to make good movies? This was one of his best. Nominally science fiction, I think it works as fantasy just as well. After an alien reconnaissance probe is shot down by the military, its pilot (Jeff Bridges in an Oscar-nominated performance) clones himself into human form. It turns out that the clone takes the form of widow Karen Allen's late husband, and she is shocked to see him again. Bridges convinces Allen to embark on a road trip to the meteor crater near Winslow, Arizona, so that he can be picked up by a rescue craft. Naturally, they fall in love along the way.

A wonderful film in many respects, *Starman*'s highlight is Jeff Bridges' knockout performance as the alien in a human body. Karen Allen is excellent as well. The down side is a standard evil government "let's catch him and do experiments" subplot, but it's easily enough ignored as you watch the chemistry between the leads, aided by Carpenter's restrained, naturalistic direction. ♦

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Continued from page 16

acters in literature. And of the characters that are part of the Arthurian legend, Merlin is the most mysterious. *The Merlin Chronicles* is an anthology of stories about this most fascinating of personalities, and it presents a wide variety of interpretations and treatments. The danger with this type of anthology is that by the time you reach the end, you'll know more about the character than you ever wanted to know, and you'll be sick to death of the subject. But *The Merlin Chronicles* manages to feed your hunger for knowledge about Merlin, while simultaneously leaving you hungry for more. A trick worthy of Merlin. The mystery of Merlin only grows as you read.

Mike Ashley provides a good introduction to the origins of Merlin and his appearances in literature over the ages. This will get you up to speed and give you a full appreciation of the references in the stories to come. The stories cover the full range of Merlin's life and loves.

In "Dream Reader," Jane Yolen provides an enchanting story of Merilinn's (Merlin's) boyhood, following the orphan as he is adopted by a traveling mage, Ambrosius, and a bard, Viviane. Merilinn at this point is innocent and good, but his life seems precarious, haunted by a growing sense of danger. We can feel the forces beginning to work which will eventually spell his doom.

Tanith Lee, in "King's Mage," paints a bittersweet portrait of Merlinus in old age. His magic is fake, but it has earned him the respect, reverence, and even love of King Arthur and his subjects. In return, Merlinus gives them, through some wine doctored with mushrooms, a vision of ultimate beauty and hope, a vision of the Grail.

In "Merlin Dreams in the Mondream Wood," Charles de Lint gives us another view of Merlin in old age, imprisoned in a tree in which only a young girl can see him. This poetic story dramatizes the difference between the way an adult sees nature and the way a child sees it, as Wordsworth says, with "the glory and the freshness of a dream."

We also learn more about the characters who surround Merlin. Marion Zimmer Bradley, for example, reworks a section of *The Mists of Avalon* to create "The Pledged Word," the intriguing story of the childhood of Nimue, whose life will later intertwine with Merlin's.

Other contributors, including Robert Holdstock, Jennifer Roberson, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, Esther Friesner, and Darrell Schweitzer, provide a range of stories from the traditional to the bizarre, providing tantalizing glimpses of different facets of Merlin's character. Yet like the magician that he is, Merlin manages to keep his true essence, the one image that unites them all,



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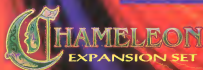


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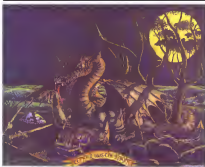
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October 1994: Premiere Issue. Fiction by L. Dean James, Chuck Braham, Julie Sue Morison, Roger Zelazny, Sarah Zettel, Neil Gaiman and Jean Lorrain. Editorial on the difference between Fantasy and Science Fiction. Book reviews of *The Hollowing*, *Skin* and *The Years Best*. Movie review of *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. Folkroots on the Green Man and Lore of the Woods. Game Reviews of *Magic: The Gathering*. Gallery of Brian Froud's work.

December 1994: Fiction by Nancy Vartan Berberich, Richard Rowland, Amy Wolf, Paula May, Andrea Schiechi, Connie Willis. Movie review of *Ann Rice's Interview With The Vampire*. Folkroots on The Music of Fairy. Gallery of the traveling Dream Weavers' exhibition.

February 1995: Fiction By Tauti Lee, Noeren Doyle, Charles de Lint, Judith Berman, Richard Parks and S.N.

Dyer, Editorial on the World Fantasy Convention. Folkroots on Beauty and The Beast folk tales, book reviews on Jack Cadiz's *Silver* and Tim Lucas' *Throat Sprockets*. Television review of *X-Files*. Gallery of J.K. Potter works. Game review of *Master of Magic*.

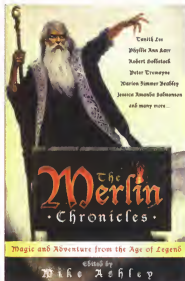
April 1995: Fiction from John Moore, Louise Cooper, Amy Wolf, Carolyn Ives Gilman, Daniel Marcus, Margaret Ball. Book reviews of *A Plague of Angels* and *Ende of the Rat God*. Folkroots column on North American folk traditions. Gallery of Dan Martin's work. Games review of *Death Gate* and *Magic Carpet*.

June 1995: Fiction by Lisa Goldstein, Martha Wells, Dan'l Danbury-Cokes, Anne Young, Deborah Wherier, Alan Dean Foster, editorial on 'writer's cruties'. Movie review of *First Knight*, *Rob Roy* and *Braveheart*. Folkroots column on North American folk traditions. Gallery on the work of Les Edwards

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*The fate of the Elven prince
was written on the day
of his birth, man.*

THE RETURN OF THE KING

BY SUSAN WADE AND DON WEBB

Illustration by Annie Lunsford

FROM THE ELVISSMAL

I WILL SING THE SONG HIGHT ELVISSMAL OF THE King's going and his return, and of the wearisome wights of the Land-of-Grace, in whose fearsome seat was the King held in thrall by enchantments and potion's bane. In the last cycle of time was a son born to A-ron, Drighten of Alfheim, and this young prince was hight El-vees. Word of his birth spread to the worlds all

nine, and from the roots of the Great Tree came the Three Norns to say the sooth of the babe.

None stayed the weird sisters in their passage nor hailed the bringers-of-doom, for neither Aesir nor Elf nor Man may stop fate, although the wisest of the wise knows how to turn it to his advantage. When the Norns came unto the bright hall of A-ron, all music and laughter ceased. Urdh, eldest of the Three, spake her doom: "El-vees, son of A-ron, will have his image painted and carved and his voice cast to sound on the very air. He shall be more honored than aught

Drighten of Alfheim has been." And a great cry went up in the joyous hall of A-ron, for surely such fame meant that El-vees would be a great King.

Then Verdhandi, second of the Three, spake her doom: "El-vees, son of A-ron, shall be draped in rich sparkling gems the like of which has never been seen in Alfheim." Again a great cheer went up, for surely such a prophecy told that the reign of the prince would bring great wealth.

Then Skuld, third of the Three, spake her doom: "El-vees, son of A-ron, shall be stolen from Alfheim down into the

Middle World, and there his corpse shall be seen to lie."

No cry arose then in the grim hall of A-ron, for in sooth such a dire doom had ne'er been spoken in the hall of any Elvish king. The Three returned to the base of the Great Tree to water its roots with the drippings of time.

A-ron summoned his councilors and asked if the weird of El-vees might be turned. The wisest of them proposed that the young prince be locked away and a vigilant guard placed round his prison night and day. So it was that A-ron sent Elf-riders down the Tree, beyond the Middle World, into the realm of the Dwarves.

From Dwarfhome came renowned metalsmiths, and the plains of Alfheim rang with the sound of their hammers. The fires of their forges lit up the night until they had fashioned a tower of surpassing beauty. Gemlike were its windows, and dazzling its walls of burnished steel. Great were the magics therein, which did feed and tend the prince, and a company of the finest Elfwarriors was set round to guard with sleepless eye, lest evil draw near.

The prince grew in knowledge, beauty, and strength, and nothing but good could be told of him. Great waxed his might at *galdor*, the magic of singing. None could hear him sing of his jailhouse without being pierced to the root with tears, and yet all remembered the terrible sayings of Skuld.

It became fashionable among Elvish maids to draw near the tower and listen to the mournful songs of El-vees. Yet only one maiden, Er-

the tower. She spoke to the guards as the spirit had charged her, and they permitted her to pour out the cup round the tower.

No sooner had Er-na emptied her cup than the great Dwarven tower began to tremble. The guards cried out, and the mages of Alfheim appeared at once. Even as they exerted their magics it was seen that the tower had begun to sink. As A-ron rode up on his charger did the prison of El-vees slip beneath the ground.

All gazed into the gaping hole, where their prince sank downward until his glittering tower passed entire from Alfheim. Down through space did it fall and was seen to land on the next branch of the Great Tree, which men call "Earth," the Elves name "Burgeon-ing," and the wise "Midgardh."

FROM THE *MAGICKAL DIARY OF GABRIEL THORN*, JUNE 21, 1955

Today while waiting to see E., I chanced to engage a comic book collector on the subject of Superman. *Superman* comics appeared in 1938, just three years after E.'s "birth." I was surprised at how quickly the myth of a superbeing from another world has entered the popular culture. The collector told me a little about the mythos: It seems the Superman has an evil arch-rival, Lex Luthor. So my suspicions were correct. There is an evil force hampering E. But who is E.'s Lex Luthor? I tried to get the collector to comment on E.'s hit "Heartbreak Hotel," but he doesn't follow popular music. He told me the real money is in hanging onto comic books, his original *Superman* will someday be worth big bucks. Maybe I should listen to him. When you're on a magical quest, sometimes the endless one sends you messengers in the form of idiots.

FROM THE *ARONAL*

The old king sickened, pining for his stolen son. His mages could do naught to heal him...in desperation they wrought a cloud of false night, which

was drawn over Alfheim, that their king might rest without reminder of his loss, but little peace did they bring to A-ron.

Dark spirits rose from the secret, ancient places of the wood, afflict-ing the Elves with dread dreams. Therefrom did all of Alfheim learn that when their childless king died, evil would overrun that fair land and blight it entire from the Tree.

FROM THE *REDE OF ER-NA*

Er-na raged and mourned and wept and sheared off her golden hair; and of it she wove a golden boat, twined round the bones of the sacred Ash, the One Tree. As she wove, she whispered her oath to the severed tresses, which shivered at their remembrance of her words of love and honor.

As she tied the final knot, she wept three tears upon it and then cast off her shoes. It was thus, shorn and unshod, with the woven boat tied to her back that Er-na did climb to the peak at the edge of the worlds, wherein is lodged the Eagle whose wings move the wind.

FROM THE *NATIONAL INQUIRATOR*, AUGUST 1956

ROCK AND ROLL A COMMUNIST PLOT

Eyewitness Reports Rock Music's "King" a Russian Invader.

A Memphis resident revealed to this reporter that he personally witnessed the rocket-ship arrival of the inventor of "rock and roll" music. Car salesman Charlie Davidson speaks of a "shining tower of steel that dropped from the skies," and reports that one of the most shameless performers of this new music, Mr. Elvis Presley, descended from the ship speaking, "some demon foreign tongue, most likely Russian. It's plain as the nose on your face that it's the [expletive deleted] Commies. This devil music is their attempt to corrupt the minds of America's youth."

FROM THE *MAGICKAL DIARY OF GABRIEL THORN*, JUNE 1, 1960

Yesterday the "man" known as Colonel Parker had me ejected bodily from E.'s home. But first I got to see E.'s "mother," Gladys. E. seems totally devoted to her, and I suspect she resembles a woman of his true world who is E.'s soulmate. Perhaps if I find this soul-

One of the most shameless performers of this new music, Mr. Elvis Presley, descended from the ship...

na, refused all others for love of the sequestered prince. Each day, she came to his sparkling tower and lamented.

From within did El-vees spy Er-na, even from so far, for she was of the line of Sif Goldenhead, her for whom the Dwarves once fashioned hair of spun gold. Thus the tresses of Er-na shone bright by the light of Fair Wheel, and swept the ground where she sat. Then verily did El-vees sing of the site of his heart's breaking, such a ballad as to make all the worlds weep. In her turn, Er-na pledged her devotion to the prince, and thus was she sworn: that while breath moved in her, she would love no other.

With such yearning did Er-na speak her oath that she drew upon them the notice of powers both ancient and dark.

Far from A-ron's hall there lay a forest old as the Great Tree itself, wherein lay many secrets dark and unrevealed. Among these was a mirk-spirit (part of the Dark Power that seeks ever to do evil, yet may act only for good), which did send a whispering to the ear of Er-na.

"Come ye to the elder wood and seek the Well of Lashmir. There I will show you the means to free your prince." Er-na, whose love had blinded her to the wisdom of her folk, went as she was bid.

Great bubbles broke the smooth surface of the water, and each bubble held a word: "Er-na, daughter of Gret-tin, of Sif's line, what is thy wish?"

"That prisoned beauty be set free, that the songs of El-vees be heard in all the worlds, and that I might protect my prince by my love alone."

"Do you not fear the doom of Skuld?"

"My love will turn that weird, if I can but free him."

"Then take a cup and dip me up from my well, that you may pour me round the base of the tower. There shall I free El-vees from the prison of the Dwarves."

"The guards will let none approach the tower."

"Say to them that you have gathered your tears for the prince and wish to spill them where he may see their number. The guards are full of romance and will be moved by your words."

Then did Er-na do as the mirk-spirit bade and made her way to

mate...I will form a telematic image to draw her here. Well, I'll do it as soon as I'm out of the hospital. Maybe I should've listened to my father and become a plumber instead of an ipsissimus.

Yog sototh nablod zin.

FROM THE REDE OF ER-NA

Er-na climbed on naked feet to the Hall of the Eagle and thereupon asked him, "What would you have of me, that I might be granted a fair wind at my need?"

The Eagle riddled his great cloaked wings. "I would have the golden boat you support on your back."

"That I cannot forsake," she replied, "save I forsake withal my troth. Ask aught else and our deal shall be struck."

"Then I shall have the bone of your smallest finger for a whistle."

And she broke off her smallest finger and gave it unto him, and, having no cloth with which to bind the wound, she caught up the feather that fell from his cloak as he grasped his prize. With this she bound her hand, and thus was their bargain made.

From there she journeyed to the river Ifling, which flows free from the world of the Aesir and is never frozen, laying her golden boat upon the racing waters... Thus it is told how Er-na did sojourn into the Middle World in deliverance of the King.

FROM THE POSTHUMOUS POEMS OF GERTRUDE STEIN

I am Elvis,
I own Graceland too,
I am Elvis
And who are you?
I am Elvis, and when I sing
I am Elvis like anything.

FROM THE REDE OF ER-NA

When she came at last to Midgardh, Er-na found the world of men vast, noisy, and foul-smelling...and there she folded her golden boat, that she might carry it under her arm, placing within the Eagle's mighty feather. Then did she wander through that great City a Mile High wherein she was hight "Hippy" and "Flower Child" and "Hey Baby."

Bravely she asked if any knew of El-vees, and a matron said she had all his albums and where had Er-na gotten that adorable purse.

"Where," asked Er-na, daughter of Gret-tin, of the line of Sif, "might I find these al-bums?"

Thereupon the kind matron did take her to a record store, wherein hung from the walls great images of El-vees in glorious garb. In this strange fane, a churl approached Er-na and said, "You are one groovy-looking kid. Can I help you?"

FROM THE MAGICKAL DIARY OF GABRIEL THORN, APRIL 30, 1966

I've been looking for her among the cast of *Paradise Hawaiian Style*. Suzanne Leigh, no. Donna Butterworth, no. Mary Treen, no. Maybe I should chuck it all and become a hougan—or whatever it is Hawaiian shamans go by these days—found a new religion on the perennial need of people to get laid....

la Ca hu-te-Leur! la Luka-lapalp!

FROM THE REDE OF ER-NA

Fearful for her prince, Er-na summoned the boldness to reply to the churl's offer of aid, saying she knew El-vees to be in mortal peril and must go to him in all haste.

The churl spake thus: "You dig the old dude? That's like really quadrilateral. Why not do the scene with me instead?"

Er-na took the boat in her hands and made that the magicks within should touch the churl. And then did he procure for her from his cousin Dee-jay a front-row seat at the concert of El-vees and even a backstage pass....

FROM THE MAGICKAL DIARY OF GABRIEL THORN, AUGUST 16, 1966

The telematic image isn't working. No matter how rigorously I prepare myself, still no results. I'm sickened by what is being done

to E. The Parker entity controls him completely now, forcing him to churn out one unspeakably bad movie after another. In his last picture, he actually sang "Song of the Shrimp." It is a horror to me to see E.'s talents turned to such ends, knowing as I do his true nature....

FROM THE REDE OF ER-NA

Afraid though she was, Er-na sojourned to the loud and smoky hall for the concert of El-vees in hopes of delivering him from his dread enchantment. And truly was she struck with joy at the sight of her beloved prince, draped as he was in rich sparkling gems. But before she could do aught to reach her prince, a mighty geas was laid upon her... And through the vast city was she compelled until she was delivered unto an abandoned warehouse. Nowhere in Midgardh had she sensed such powerful magic save for that in the mirksome ring surrounding El-vees. Into the warehouse went she and there met Gabriel-thorn, a human *vitki*.

FROM THE MAGICKAL DIARY OF GABRIEL THORN, OCTOBER 30, 1966

At last! After all these months, I have finally met with success. E.'s soulmate arrived at my door a little before midnight tonight. She is extraordinarily lovely, in spite of that Twiggy-look hair, and her name is Er-na...

FROM THE REDE OF ER-NA

With the aid of the *vitki* Gabriel, Er-na learned much of her prince. Direly was it borne upon her that time passed more swiftly in Midgardh than on other branches of the Tree. Many evil workings had the mirk-spirit brought to pass in that span, and Gabriel revealed to her the spirit was hight Col-tom and even then sought to gain greater sway in the world of men...

FROM THE MAGICKAL DIARY OF GABRIEL THORN, APRIL 30, 1967

Had to tell Er-na today about the wedding announcement. I could hardly bear to look at her when I told her. Worse, the girl E. is to "marry" (Priscilla) could be Er-na's twin, except for the black hair. It's positively uncanny. Parker's crazier than I thought if he believes this maneuver will prevent me from effecting a reconciliation between E. and Er-na.

When I broke the news, she actually stroked my arm to comfort me. Her faith in him is unflinching. But when I looked at her poor mutilated hand, I was overcome with rage. We must move quickly to end this charade, but the "colonel" is a powerful foe.

FROM THE REDE OF ER-NA

Thus did she learn of the great ruler of the Middle World, Richard Nix-on, whom Col-tom desired to control through El-vees. She and her ally Gabriel formed a plan whereby El-vees might be brought outside the sway of Col-tom, if only briefly.... Thus did Gabriel send word to Richard Nix-on of a great storm that would be brought to pass....

FROM THE MAGICKAL DIARY OF GABRIEL THORN, MARCH 13, 1969

The Summoning went well; we are assured of our audience with E. Despite my experience with forces otherworldly, it was eerie. Er-na opened her woven bag and took out an enormous feather that looked like molten bronze, stained with dark splotches. She blew upon it until a whistling sound emanated from its plumule.

The wind rose immediately, and in it I heard a shrill high piping that seemed to cry her name. Later, when I asked her about it, she looked at me somberly and would say only that I was a powerful *vitki* indeed to hear the voice of the Eagle so clear.

We came home afterward and watched footage from the *Apollo 9* orbit on TV. There were some incredible shots, but it meant nothing to her. She asked if this were the world to which we would travel during the magick we plan at the White House. I told her no, that it was the moon, which she said is known among her people as "Teller of Time."

She is so beautiful it scares me. I fear I will forget my mission. Her hair has grown out and really looks like spun gold. Seeing her, I am reminded that the real word for "of the elves" is not *elvish* but *eldritch*.

Regardless of my sentiments though, tomorrow I pay my penultimate call on President Richard Nixon, to make final arrangements. And on the Equinox, in the Oval Office, I shall invoke Barzabel.

FROM *IN THE SERVICE: AN ACCOUNT OF THE NIXON PRESIDENCY From a Secret Serviceman*, by Tom O'Quinn, Paladin Books, Tucson

By far the strangest job I did for Dick was in the spring of 1969. The cherry blossoms had turned Washington into a fairyland, a place where myths could live and L'Enfant's dream of a geometrical power center seemed realized....

The buzzer summoned me to the O.O. I could tell Dick had something important on his mind, some secret of state he could reveal only to me.

"Tom," he said. "Tomorrow Elvis Presley will visit me here. I need you to do three things for me."

"Anything, Mr. President."

"When he arrives, I want you to keep everybody away from the O.O. for a couple of hours. This visit is strictly off the record—security reasons. Secondly, after Elvis enters this office, spread these filings outside that door." He handed me a heavy gold-colored velvet bag. "Afterward, be sure nobody—not even Pat—comes in. This includes you. Pay no attention to any strange sounds or smells. Thirdly, I want you to forget—keep quiet on this matter for a few years. This is not only a matter of national security, Tom, it is a matter of planetary security."

Dick had never spoken to me with such gravity before. I guessed that Kissinger had done something terrible during his last round of shuttle diplomacy. I saluted because it seemed the right thing to do.

Elvis Presley arrived the next day wearing a white leather suit with silver studs along the seams. (You may be thinking about the black velveteen jumpsuit and the big belt and cape he's wearing in all the pictures, but this was earlier. I may be the only man on our side—other than the president, of course—to know that Presley's publicized visit to the White House wasn't his first.) Anyway, I showed him into the president, and as the door closed behind me, I heard Dick say, "Boy, you sure do dress kinda wild."

I spread the iron filings in front of the door, then guarded the corridor. I heard someone enter from the President's private door. Then I heard the voices of a man and woman I didn't recognize, speaking in a foreign tongue—and then Elvis started talking the same way. Maybe Reverend Billy Bob back in Pine Bluff had been right and Elvis was a Commie. The reverend's the one talked me into my first tour in 'Nam. Right about then is when I came over dizzy, and the smell of war oozed from under the door. Blood and cordite and the jungle and hot metal, and for a crazy moment I wanted to kill Charley, kill kill kill....

Then things came back in focus. It was quiet as a tomb. The iron filings were still there, but all lined up now, pointing straight at the door. I put my ear to the door, but couldn't hear anything.

I held my post, though. It was an hour and a half before Elvis and Dick came out of the O.O. Elvis looked real shook up, and Dick acted like he was in a trance. There were scorch marks and wet spots on the carpet inside.

Later I found out that's when Dick first got the idea of giving Elvis a federal marshal's badge....

FROM *THE MAGICCKAL DIARY OF GABRIEL THORN*, MARCH 23, 1969

The White House Working went even beyond my expectations. With the aid of Barzabel, I translated the Oval Office to that far sphere. Once beyond the influence of Earth, the spell fell away from E.

Instantly, he began speaking in the Elvish tongue, and he and Er-na rushed to embrace. So much for Parker's schemes to turn E's affections. It took only a few minutes to arrive on Mars. I'd almost forgotten Nixon. The Planetary Demonium had a strong effect on his personality—he must've repressed his warlike nature too long. He kept muttering something about starting a rumor that he was the mad bomber.

Anyway, as soon as E. and Er-na were sensible, I laid it on the line. I told E. he'd been abducted by a mirk-spirit intent on bringing ruin

to Alheim, and if he didn't get back quick, that part of the Tree would die. And once it fell, the Eagle above and the Dragon below would finish off the whole ordered cosmos. E. said he was ready to go any time.

"Not so easy," I said. "Because of your unearthly charisma you have thousands of fans who worship you as a hero, if not a god. Your sudden disappearance would found a new religion and destroy this world's civilization in the Dark Ages that always follow the birth of a new faith."

"You must first do something to turn your fans against you, and your departure must be concealed from the mirk-spirit. Thus, though there will always be a Cult of Elvis, in the fullness of time, it will merge with that of other heroes."

E. was willing to do whatever was best but said as soon as we returned to Earth, the spell would descend on him again. I gave him a charm to help him resist the colonel's potions, and told him to call us as soon as he could.

Er-na said his actions would come to be known as El-vees' Secret Honor. Nixon asked what she'd said, and I translated. He kept muttering, "Secret honor, secret honor."

I'd begun the spell to return when Barzabel—sounding like the clanging of a thousand swords—bade me stop. The demonium asked if E. would sing. E. said he'd do anything to please a fan, and sang "Blue Suede Shoes." Barzabel loved it.

As we journeyed back to Earth, Nixon asked if the Illuminati (I had so represented us) were satisfied now that he had served us. I said yes, and he thanked me for the illumination he'd undergone. No idea what he meant, but I hope he found the experience transformative. Er-na and I exited the White House, considering how we might best conceal E.'s departure....

FROM *THE MAGICCKAL DIARY OF GABRIEL THORN*, OCTOBER 29, 1969

Just got off the phone with E. He'd managed to sneak to a diner and call. So far the charm I gave him is working against the "colonel," but E. thinks we have to speed up our plan.

E. is convinced Priscilla's child—nearly two years old now—was conceived by some magick of "the colonel's." E. fears a mirkish stratagem to gain dominion over Alheim—"Parker" has threatened to marry the child to the Dwarfen King and thus see himself enthroned in Drightenhall.

E. has told "Parker" he'll have nothing more to do with Priscilla; he is more and more himself because of the charm's protection and Er-na's presence in this world. I told him to send us his clothes by special courier before returning to the hotel. He was eager to do anything that would hasten his release....

FROM *THE MAGICCKAL DIARY OF GABRIEL THORN*, OCTOBER 31, 1969

When I told Er-na of E.'s urgent wish to return, she suggested the Yule as an auspicious date for the Working. Unfortunately, that doesn't leave us much time to get the replica ready and put it in place, so we must move forward immediately. I have misgivings, though whether it is uncertainty about my powers or simply the urgings of my heart, I cannot say. In truth, though, I will miss her greatly.

We will perform this ritual tonight at midnight, right here in Mad Dog, Texas.

1) Light incense; 2) Uncover clay statue of Elvis; 3) Perform invocation; 4) Dress statue in E.'s clothes; 5) Er-na to read elemental summoning: "From Chicago do I call blues, which give voice to the secret aches of the heart, from Nashville do I call country, which is the balm that folks use to re-create their lives...."

[Ed.'s note: The remainder of this section of the *Diary* has been obliterated by stains from what appears to be Grape Nehi.]

FROM *THE MAD DOG GLOBE NEWS*, NOVEMBER 1, 1969

... a weird incident from last night's police blotter. Several children in the Country Club subdivision reported being attacked shortly after midnight. A figure dressed as rock 'n' roll legend Elvis Presley grabbed the kids' sacks of candy and ran off toward Sam Houston Park, police said.

FROM THE *MAGICKAL DIARY OF GABRIEL THORN*, NOVEMBER 5, 1969

We may have some trouble with food. It is developing a taste for fried peanut butter and banana sandwiches.

FROM *ZEN AND THE ART OF BEING A SECURITY GUARD* BY VINCENT CLARK, Tofu Press, Berkeley, 1985

My first Zen koan came to me in the year 1969. In my unenlightened state, I was working security—main door guard—at G-String Studios, where *From Elvis in Memphis* was recorded.

Elvis' career was heating up then, because of the big success of the previous year's Christmas Special from NBC. The producer, Steve Binder, had somehow out-manuevered the colonel and convinced Elvis to get back to his roots....

Elvis and his entourage arrived around four that day to start recording, and the music seemed to come from another world, the primal Earth. Or maybe I was listening with new ears.

About an hour later, someone knocked on the main door, and it was Elvis again! Except he didn't look as lean, or maybe just not as alert. With him was the most beautiful blonde I've ever seen and a tall man in dark shades who had a very powerful aura.

I was in the shock that leads to enlightenment, and the tall man finished the job for me. He told me, "The key is 'blue.'"

Then they went on in, and I didn't think anything more about it until I heard Elvis sing "Blue Christmas," whereupon I achieved enlightenment. In my altered state, you could've driven a truck by me and I wouldn't have noticed. But later on, after his death, when everything started coming out—about Elvis' twin Jesse Garon having really been alive all along, and how it's his voice singing duet on Jerry Lee Lewis' "Save the Last Dance for Me"—I understood the truth of what happened that day in the studio.

FROM THE *REDE OF ER-NA*

As the stars turned and the auspices grew strong for Er-na to arrive with her prince to Alfheim, she saw that the *vitki* Gabriel was saddened. As, in truth, was she herself, for in all the vast strangeness of the Middle Yard, Gabriel had been her one true friend....

FROM THE *MAGICKAL DIARY OF GABRIEL THORN*, DECEMBER 25, 1969, 1:45 a.m.

At midnight, E and Er-na wended their way to the Eldritch world. E's album is being aired tonight for the first time. A Christmas present. Our world's final legacy from the True King. The music will have great power, and I was touched that he wanted to do it himself, in spite of the risk involved in prolonging the switch. When I think of both of them there in the same recording studio for better than three hours...but I am distracted from this chronicle and even from my parting with my friends by something extraordinary that's taken place. In truth, my hands are trembling so much I can scarcely write.

Tonight, Er-na called me aside and said, "Vitki, I have learnt well your arts magical and have made a gift for you." I followed her to the hotel room next to the one she and E were sharing. She turned on the light and there on the bed lay a replica of herself.

"She will awaken when El-vees and I reach Alfheim, unless you wake her before then. I call her Er-na Galatea, and she is to be your companion, Gabriel."

After I pen this, I will go and awaken her. Just as the Elvis replica lusting after food and strange chemicals because of Halloween candy being the first thing he saw (Damn those kids!), she will love me if she sees me first.

FROM THE *MAGICKAL DIARY OF GABRIEL THORN*, JUNE 12, 1977

E's simulacrum has become almost uncontrollable with his glut-tony and his drugging. The struggle to command his appetites from a distance has grown overwhelming.

In hindsight, it's clear I should have waited until Galatea awakened naturally, so I could be certain that Er-na and E had arrived

safely in Alfheim. As it is, with the time slippage, I have no reassurances that they are there even now. If the replica continues in its excesses, it will explode the binding magicks. I fear the mirk-spirit may do my friends terrible hurt if they are yet between branches when that happens. And I have seen a disturbing vision: If E and Er-na do not survive to have children, the spirit will hold sway in Alfheim by means of E's half-human child....

Galatea is wonderful, the most loving companion a man could have. After eight years, I sometimes forget her origins, but when I see her hand, with all its fingers intact, I can't help but remember all Er-na sacrificed for us, and worry about her.

FROM THE *ARONAL*

The green leaves had departed all from the land, and all song from the lips of the Elves. A-ron lay, his flesh pale and wasted, as the lands of his people wasted around him. The wise council gathered dolefully within that dismal hall; soon his last breath would fade and all life from Alfheim would go. Great waxed the groaning of the Tree as this branch failed, and the triumphant snarls of Nidhogg, the worm, could be heard from below.

Stunned scientists try to make sense out of a statue of the rock 'n' roll king found on the surface of Mars!

Then a voice as rich as Dwaven gold was heard, and as the song swelled forth did A-ron's fitful sleep alter, becoming a true slumber. As his breathing eased, fair color returned to his face, and the people saw that he would live.

Great was the wonderment in Alfheim as it was seen that leaves were sprouting and flourishing on the barren trees. And soon they knew that vigor also was restored to the One Tree, and there was great rejoicing among the Elves.

Then the clouds of false night were sundered, and standing in the vale were two radiant Elves, who smiled upon the people; and one spoke, saying, "Peace and joy to all of Alfheim. I am El-vees A-ron, just returned from Midgardh."

FROM THE *MAGICKAL DIARY OF GABRIEL THORN*, AUGUST 16, 1977

The simulacrum expired a little while ago, at 9:09 this morning. I felt the explosion of the bindings....

FROM "ALL SHOOK UP," BY MARCUS GRAIL, *ROLLING STONE*, August 22, 1977

This is the music that changed the world, the sound that capsized our culture during the formative years of our lives, the root of all that came after. Without him, we would never have had the Beatles or the Stones or Clapton or any of the others who followed.... Or, at the least, we wouldn't have had them in the same way.

What happens when our music is cut off from its roots? Will Elvis change us as much with his death as he did with his life?

FROM THE *ARONAL*

...thus it was that A-ron's heart was moved in its very rejoicing, to see the folk of the Middle World so grieved at the supposed death of El-vees. For this was what was shown to A-ron in Fargnir's Mirror: that the people of that world wrought sixteen wondrous carriages of shining, white metal to draw the Bier of El-vees; and that they did cover it over with half a thousand vermilion flowers of a surpassing fragrance; and that the tribes of the Middle World who gathered at the Land-of-Grace to honor him numbered half a thousand thousands....

And in his mercy, A-ron bid his mages bring forth a great wreaking. This magick was to carry to the folk of Middle Earth—wheresoever El-vees had traveled among them—the

Continued on page 78





What happens when a man who believes in nothing suddenly comes face to face with...something? A new novelette from one of the field's most celebrated authors.

DIANA OF THE HUNDRED BREASTS

BY ROBERT SILVERBERG

Illustration by Web Bryant

THE TWO FAMOUS MARBLE STATUES stand facing each other in a front room of the little museum in the scruffy Turkish town of Seljuk, which lies just north of the ruins of the once-great Greek and Roman city of Ephesus. There was a photograph of the bigger one in my guidebook, of course. But it hadn't prepared me — photos never really do — for the full bizarre impact of the actuality.

The larger of the statues is about nine feet tall, the other one about six. Archaeologists found both of them in the courtyard of a building of this ancient city where the goddess Diana was revered. They show — you must have seen a picture of one, some time or other — a serene, slender woman wearing an ornamental headdress that is all that remains of a huge,

intricate crown. Her arms are outstretched and the lower half of her body is swathed in a tight cylindrical gown. From waist to ankles, that gown is decorated with rows of vividly carved images of bees and of cattle. But that's not where your eyes travel first, because the entire midsection of Diana of Ephesus is festooned with a grotesque triple ring of bulging pendulous breasts. Dozens of them, or several dozens. A great many.

"Perhaps they're actually eggs," said my brother Charlie the professor, standing just behind me. For the past eighteen months Charlie had been one of the leaders of the team of University of Pennsylvania archaeologists that has been digging lately at Ephesus. "Or fruits of some kind, apples, pears. Nobody's really sure. Globular fertility symbols, that's all we can say. But I think they're tits, myself.

The tits of the Great Mother, with an abundance of milk for all. Enough tits to satisfy anybody's oral cravings, and then some."

"An abomination before the Lord," murmured our new companion Mr. Gladstone, the diligent Christian tourist, just about when I was expecting him to say something like that.

"Tits?" Charlie asked.

"These statues. They should be smashed in a thousand pieces and buried in the earth whence they came." He said it mildly, but he meant it.

"What a great loss to art that would be," said Charlie in his most pious way. "Anyway, the original statue from which these were copied fell from heaven. That's what the Bible says, right? Book of Acts. The image that Jupiter tossed down from the sky. It could be argued that Jupiter is simply one manifestation of Jehovah. Therefore this is a holy image. Wouldn't you say so, Mr. Gladstone?"

There was a cruel edge on Charlie's voice; but, then, Charlie is cruel. Charming, of course, and ferociously bright, but above all else a smart-ass. He's three years older than I am, and three times as intelligent. You can imagine what my childhood was like. If I had ever taken his cruelties seriously, I suspect I would hate him, but the best defense against Charlie is never to take him seriously. I never have, nor anything much else, either. In that way Charlie and I are similar, I suppose. But only in that way.

Mr. Gladstone refused to be drawn into Charlie's bantering defense of idolatry. Maybe he too had figured out how to handle Charlie, a lot quicker than I ever did.

"You are a cynic and a sophist, Dr. Walker," is all that he said. "There is no profit in disputing these matters with cynics. Or with sophists. Especially with sophists." And to me, five minutes later, as we rambled through a room full of mosaics and frescoes and little bronze statuettes: "Your brother is a sly and very clever man. But there's a hollowness about him that saddens me. I wish I could help him. I feel a great deal of pity for him, you know."

THAT ANYONE WOULD WANT TO FEEL PITY FOR CHARLIE WAS A new concept to me. Envy, yes. Resentment, disapproval, animosity, even fear, perhaps. But *pity*? For the six-foot-three genius with the blond hair and blue eyes, the movie-star face, the seven-figure trust fund, the four-digit I.Q.? I am tall too, and when I reached twenty-one I came into money also, and I am neither stupid nor ugly; but it was always Charlie who got the archery trophy, the prom queen, the honor-roll scroll, the Phi Beta Kappa key. It was Charlie who always got anything and everything he wanted, effortlessly, sometimes bestowing his leftovers on me, but always in a patronizing way that thoroughly tainted them. I have sensed people pitying me, sometimes, because they look upon me as Charlie-minus, an inad-

equat simulacrum of the genuine article, a pallid secondary version of the extraordinary Charlie. In truth I think their compassion for me, if that's what it is, is misplaced: I don't see myself as all that goddamned pitiful. But Charlie? Pitying Charlie?

I was touring Greece and Turkey that spring, mostly the usual Aegean resorts, Mykonos and Corfu and Crete, Rhodes and Bodrum and Marmaris. I wander up and down the Mediterranean about half the year, generally, and though I'm scarcely a scholar, I do of course look in on the various famous classical sites along my way. By now, I suppose, I've seen every ruined Roman and Greek temple and triumphal arch and ancient theater there is, from Volubilis and Thuburbo Majus in North Africa up through Sicily and Pompeii, and out to Spain and France on one side and Syria and Lebanon on the other. They all blur and run together in my mind, becoming a single generic site — fallen marble columns, weather-beaten foundations, sand, little skittering lizards, blazing sun, swarthy men selling picture postcards — but I keep on prowling them anyway. I don't quite know why.

There are no hotels remotely worthy of the name in or around the Ephesus ruins. But Charlie had tipped me off that I would find, about six miles down the road, a lavish new

deluxe place high up on a lonely point overlooking the serene Aegean that catered mostly to groups of sun-worshipping Germans. It had an immense lobby with marble floors and panoramic windows, an enormous swimming pool, and an assortment of dining rooms that resounded day and night with the whoops and hollers of the beefy Deutschers, who never seemed to leave the hotel. Charlie drove out there to have dinner with me the night I arrived, and that was when we met Mr. Gladstone.

"Excuse me," Gladstone said, hovering beside our table, "but I couldn't help hearing you speaking in English. I don't speak German at all and, well, frankly, among all these foreigners I've been getting a little lonely for the mother tongue. Do you mind if I join you?"

"Well —" I said, not really eager for his company, because tonight was the first time I had seen my brother in a couple of years. But Charlie grandly waved him to a seat.

He was a grayish, cheerful man of about sixty, a small-town pastor from Ohio or Indiana or maybe Iowa, and he had been saving for something like twenty years to take an extensive tour of the Christian holy places of the Middle East. For the past three months he had been traveling with a little group of pilgrims, I guess one could call them, six weeks bussing through Israel from Jerusalem to Beersheba, down to Mount Sinai, back up through the Galilee to Lebanon to see Sidon and Tyre, then out to Damascus, and so on and so on, the full Two-Testament Special. His traveling companions all had flown home by now, but Mr. Gladstone had bravely arranged a special side trip just for himself to Turkey — to poky little Seljuk in particular — because his late wife had had a special interest in an important Christian site here. He had never traveled anywhere by himself before, not even in the States, and going it alone in Turkey was a bit of a stretch for him. But he felt he owed it to his wife's memory to make the trip, and so he was resolutely plugging along on his own here, having flown from Beirut to Izmir and then hiring a car and driver to bring him down to Seljuk. He had arrived earlier this day.

"I didn't realize there was anything of special Christian interest around here," I said.

"The Cave of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus," Mr. Gladstone

THERE WAS A CRUEL EDGE on Charlie's voice; but, then, Charlie is cruel. Charming, of course, and ferociously bright, but above all else a smart-ass.

explained. "My wife once wrote a little book for children about the Seven Sleepers. It was always her great hope to see their actual cave."

"The Seven Sleepers?"

He sketched the story for me quickly: the seven devout Christian boys who took refuge in a cave rather than offer sacrifices in the temple of the Roman gods, and who fell into a deep sleep and came forth two hundred years later to discover that Christianity had miraculously become the official religion of Rome while they were doing their Rip van Winkle act. What was supposedly their cave may still be seen just beyond the Roman stadium of Ephesus.

"There's also the Meryemana," Charlie said.

Mr. Gladstone gave him a polite blank smile. "Beg your pardon?"

"The house where the Virgin Mary lived in the last years of her life. Jesus told St. John the Apostle to look after her, and he brought her to Ephesus, so it's said. About a hundred years ago some Eastern Orthodox priests went looking for her house and found it, sure enough, about three miles outside town."

"Indeed."

"More likely it's sixth century Byzantine," said Charlie. "But the foundations are much older. The Orthodox Christians go there on pilgrimage every summer. You really ought to see it." He smiled his warmest, most savage smile. "Ephesus has always been a center of mother-goddess worship, you know, and apparently it has continued to be one even in post-pagan times."

Mr. Gladstone's lips quirked ever so slightly. Though I assumed — correctly — that he was Protestant, even a Presbyterian was bound to be annoyed at hearing someone call the Virgin Mary a mother-goddess. But all he said was, "It would be interesting to see, yes."

Charlie wouldn't let up. "You will, of course, look in at the Seljuk Museum to see the predecessor goddess' statue, won't you? Diana, I mean. Diana of the Hundred Breasts. It's best to visit the museum before you begin your tour of the ruins, anyway. And the statues — there are two, actually — sum up the whole concept of the sacred female principle in a really spectacular way. The primordial mother, the great archetype. The celestial cow that nourishes the world. You need to see it, if you want truly to understand the bipolar sexual nature of the divine, eh, Mr. G?" He glanced toward me. "You too, Tim. The two of you, meet me in front of the museum at nine tomorrow, OK? Basic orientation lecture by Dr. Walker. Followed by a visit to ancient Ephesus, including the Cave of the Seven Sleepers. Perhaps the Meryemana afterward." Charlie flashed a dazzling grin. "Will you have some wine, Mr. Gladstone?"

"No, thank you," Mr. Gladstone said, quickly putting his hand over the empty glass in front of him.

AFTER THE MUSEUM, THE NEXT MORNING, WE DOUBLED BACK TO the ruins of Ephesus proper. Mobs of tour groups were already there, milling around befuddled as tour groups will do, but Charlie zipped right around them to the best stuff. The ruins are in a marvelous state of preservation — a nearly intact Roman city of the first century A.D., the usual forum and temples and stadium and gymnasium and such, and of course the famous two-story library that the Turks feature on all those tourist posters.

We had the best of all possible guides. Charlie has a genuine passion for archaeology — it's the only thing, I suspect, that he really cares for, other than himself — and he pointed out a million details that we would otherwise have missed. With special relish he

dwelt on the grotesqueries of the cult of Diana, telling us not only about the metaphorical significance of the goddess' multiplicity of breasts, but about the high priest who was always a eunuch. "His title," said Charlie, "meant 'He who has been set free by God'" — and the staff of virgins who assisted him, and the special priests known as the Acrobatae, or "walkers on tip-toe," et cetera, et cetera. Mr. Gladstone showed signs of definite distaste as Charlie went on to speculate on some of the more flamboyant erotic aspects of pagan worship hereabouts, but he wouldn't stop. He never does, when he has a chance to display his erudition and simultaneously offend and unsettle someone.

Eventually it was midafternoon and the day had become really hot. We were only halfway through our tour of the ancient city, with the Cave of the Seven Sleepers still a mile or two in the distance, and clearly Mr. Gladstone was willing. We decided to call it a day and had a late lunch of kebabs and stewed eggplant at one of the innumerable and interchangeable little bistros in town. "We can go to the cave first thing tomorrow morning, when it's still cool," Charlie offered.

"Thank you. But I think I would prefer to visit it alone, if you don't mind. A private pilgrimage — for my late wife's sake, do you see? Something of a ceremonial observance."

"Certainly," Charlie intoned reverently. "I quite understand."

I asked Charlie if he would be coming out to the hotel again that evening for dinner with me. No, he said, he would be busy at the dig — the cool of the evening was a good time to work, without the distraction of gawking tourists — but we arranged to meet in the morning for breakfast and a little brotherly catching up on family news. I left him in town and drove back to the hotel with Mr. Gladstone.

"Your brother isn't a religious man, is he?" he said.

"I'm afraid that neither of us is, especially. It's the way we were raised."

"But he *really* isn't. You're merely indifferent; he is hostile."

"How can you tell?"

"Because," he said, "he was trying so hard to provoke me with those things he was saying about Diana of Ephesus. He makes no distinction between Christianity and paganism. All religions must be the same to him, mere silly cults. And so he thinks he can get at my beliefs somehow by portraying pagan worship as absurd and bizarre."

"He looks upon them all as cults, yes. But silly,

no. In fact Charlie takes religion very seriously, though not exactly in the same way you do. He regards it as a conspiracy by the power elite to remain on top at the expense of the masses. And holy scriptures are just works of fiction dreamed up to perpetuate the authority of the priests and their bosses."

"He sees all religions that way, does he, without making distinctions?"

"Every one of them, yes. Always the same thing, throughout the whole of human history."

"The poor man," said Mr. Gladstone. "The poor empty-souled man. If only I could set him straight, somehow!"

There it was again — the compassion, the pity. For Charlie, of all people! Fascinating. Fascinating.

"I doubt that you'd succeed," I told him. "He's inherently a skeptical person. He's never been anything else. And he's a scientist, remember, a man who lives or dies by rational explanations. If it can't be explained, then it probably isn't real. He doesn't have a

THE PRIMORDIAL MOTHER,
the celestial cow that
nourishes the world. You
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bipolar sexual nature of the divine, eh...

smidgen of belief in anything he can't see and touch and measure."

"He is incapable of giving credence to the evidence of things not seen?"

"Excuse me?"

"The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Book of Hebrews, 11:1. It's St. Paul's definition of faith."

"Ah."

"St. Paul was here, you know. In this town, in Ephesus, on a missionary journey. Gods that are fashioned by human hands are no gods at all, he told the populace. Whereupon a certain Demetrius, a silversmith who earned his living making statuettes of the many-breasted goddess whose images we saw today in the museum, called his colleagues together and said, 'If this man has his way, the temple of the great goddess Diana will be destroyed and we will lose our livelihoods.' And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians.' And the whole city was filled with confusion. That's the Book of Acts, 19:28. And there was such a huge uproar in town over the things that Paul was preaching that he found it prudent to depart very quickly for Macedonia."

"I see."

"But the temple of the goddess was destroyed anyway, eventually. And her statues were cast down and buried in the earth, and now are seen only in museums."

"And the people of Ephesus became Christians," I said. "And Moslems after that, it would seem."

He looked startled. My gratuitous little dig had clearly stung him. But then he smiled.

"I see that you are your brother's brother," he said.

I WAS UP LATE READING, AND THINKING ABOUT CHARLIE, AND staring at the moonlight shimmering on the bay. About half past eleven I hit the sack. Almost immediately my phone rang.

Charlie. "Are you alone, bro?"

"No," I said. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Gladstone and I are hunkering down getting ready to commit abominations before the Lord."

"I thought maybe one of those horny Kraut ladies—"

"Cut it out. I'm alone, Charlie. And pretty sleepy. What is it?"

"Can you come down to the ruins? There's something I want to show you."

"Right now?"

"Now is a good time for this."

"I told you I was sleepy."

"It's something big, Tim. I need to show it to somebody, and you're the only person on this planet I even halfway trust."

"Something you discovered tonight?"

"Get in your car and come on down. I'll meet you by the Magnesian Gate. That's the back entrance. Go past the museum and turn right at the crossroads in town."

"Charlie—"

"Move your ass, bro. Please."

That "please," from Charlie, was something very unusual. In twenty minutes I was at the gate. He was waiting there, swinging a huge flashlight. A tool sack was slung over one shoulder. He looked wound up tight, as tense as I had ever seen him.

Selecting a key from a chain that held at least thirty of them, he unlocked the gate and led me down a long straight avenue paved with worn blocks of stone. The moon was practically full and the ancient city was bathed in cool silvery light. He pointed out the buildings as we went by them: "The Baths of Varius. The Basilica. The

Necropolis. The Temple of Isis." He droned the names in a sing-song tone as though this was just one more guided tour. We turned to the right, onto another street that I recognized as the main one, where earlier that day I had seen the Gate of Hercules, the Temple of Hadrian, the library. "Here we are. Back of the brothel and the latrine."

We scrambled uphill perhaps fifty yards through gnarled scrubby underbrush until we came to a padlocked metal grate set in the ground in an otherwise empty area. Charlie produced the proper key and pulled back the grate. His flashlight beam revealed a rough earthen-walled tunnel, maybe five feet high, leading into the hillside. The air inside was hot and stale, with a sweet heavy odor of dry soil. After about twenty feet the tunnel forked. Crouching, we followed the right-hand fork, pushing our way through some bundles of dried leaves that seemed to have been put there to block its entrance.

"Look there," he said.

He shot the beam off to the left and I found myself staring at a place where the tunnel wall had been very carefully smoothed. An upright circular slab of rough-hewn marble perhaps a yard across was set into it there.

"What is it?" I asked him. "A gravestone? A commemorative plaque?"

"Some sort of door, more likely. Covering a funeral chamber, I would suspect. You see these?" He indicated three smaller circles of what looked like baked clay, mounted in a symmetrical way over the marble slab, arranged to form the angles of an equilateral triangle. They overlapped the edges of the slab as though sealing it into the wall. I went closer and saw inscriptions carved into the clay circles, an array of mysterious symbols and letters.

"What language is this? Not Greek. Hebrew, maybe?"

"No. I don't actually know what it is. Some unknown Anatolian script, or some peculiar form of Aramaic or Phoenician—I just can't say, Timmo. Maybe it's a nonsense script, even. Purely decorative sacred scribbles conveying spells to keep intruders away, maybe."

You know, some kind of magical mumbo jumbo. It might be anything."

"You found this tonight?"

"Three weeks ago. We've known this tunnel was here for a long time, but it was thought to be empty. I happened to be doing some sonar scanning overhead and I got an echo back from a previously uncharted branch, so I came down and took a look around. Nobody knows about it but me. And you."

Gingerly I ran my hand over the face of the marble slab. It was extraordinarily

smooth, cool to the touch. I had the peculiar illusion that my fingertips were tingling, as though from a mild electrical charge.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"Open it."

"Now?"

"Now, bro. You and me."

"You can't do that!"

"I can't?"

"You're part of an expedition, Charlie. You can't just bust into a tomb, or whatever this is, on your own. It isn't proper procedure, is it? You need to have the other scientists here. And the Turkish antiquities officials—they'll string you up by the balls if they find out you've done a bit of secret freelance excavating without notifying any local authorities."

"We break the seals. We look inside. If there's anything important in there, we check it out just to gratify our own curiosity and then we go away, and in the morning I discover it all over again and raise

IN TWENTY MINUTES I WAS AT the gate. He was waiting there, swinging a huge flashlight. A tool sack was slung over one shoulder. He looked wound up tight, as tense as I had ever seen him.

a big hullabaloo and we go through all the proper procedure then. Listen, bro, there could be something big in there, don't you see? The grave of a high priest. The grave of some prehistoric king. The lost treasure of the Temple of Diana. The Ark of the Covenant. Anything. Anything. Whatever it is, I want to know. And I want to see it before anybody else does."

He was lit up with a passion so great that I could scarcely recognize him as my cool brother Charlie.

"How are you going to explain the broken seals?"

"Broken by some tomb-robbler in antiquity," he said. "Who got frightened away before he could finish the job."

He had always been a law unto himself, my brother Charlie. I argued with him a little more, but I knew it would do no good. He had never been much of a team player. He wasn't going to have five or six wumpy colleagues and a bunch of Turkish antiquities officials staring over his shoulder while that sealed chamber was opened for the first time in two thousand years.

He drew a small battery-powered lamp from his sack and set it on the ground. Then he began to pull the implements of his trade out of the sack, the little chisels, the camel's hair-brushes, the diamond-bladed hacksaw.

"Why did you wait until I got here before you opened it?" I asked. "Because I thought I might need help pulling that slab out of the wall, and who could I trust except you? Besides, I wanted an audience for the grand event."

"Of course."

"You know me, Timmo."

"So I do, bro. So I do."

He began very carefully to chisel off one of the clay seals. It came away in two chunks. Setting it to one side, he went to work on the second one, and then the third. Then he dug his fingertips into the earthen wall at the edge of the slab and gave it an experimental tug.

"I do need you," he said. "Put your shoulder against the slab and steady it as I pry it with this crowbar. I don't want it just toppling out."

Bit by bit he wiggled it free. As it started to pivot and fall forward I leaned all my weight into it, and Charlie reached across me and caught it too, and together we were able to brace it as it left its aperture and guide it down carefully to the ground.

We stared into the blackest of black holes. Ancient musty air came roaring forth in a long, dry whoosh. Charlie leaned forward and started to poke the flashlight into the opening.

But then he pulled back sharply and turned away, gasping as though he had inhaled a wisp of something noxious.

"Charlie?"

"Just a second." He waved his hand near his head a couple of times, the way you might do when brushing away a cobweb. "Just — a — goddamn — second, Tim!" A convulsive shiver ran through him. Automatically I moved toward him to see what the matter was and as I came up beside him in front of that dark opening I felt a sudden weird sensation, a jolt, a jab, and my head began to spin. And for a moment — just a moment — I seemed to hear a strange music, an eerie, high-pitched wailing sound like the keening of elevator cables far, far away. In that crazy incomprehensible moment I imagined that I was standing at the rim of a deep ancient well, the oldest well of all, the well from which all creation flows, with strange shadowy things churning and throbbing down below, and from its depths rose a wild rush of perfumed air that dizzied and intoxicated me.

Then the moment passed and I was in my right mind again and I looked at Charlie and he looked at me.

"You felt it too, didn't you?" I said.

"Felt what?" he demanded fiercely. He seemed almost angry.

I searched for the words. But it was all fading, fading fast, and there was only Charlie with his face jammed into mine, angry Charlie, terrifying Charlie, practically daring me to claim that anything peculiar had happened.

"It was very odd, bro," I said finally. "Like a drug thing, almost."

"Oxygen deprivation, is all. A blast of old stale air."

"You think?"

"I know."

But he seemed uncharacteristically hesitant, even a little befuddled. He stood at an angle to the opening, head turned away, shoulders slumping, the flashlight dangling from his hand.

"Aren't you going to look inside?" I asked, after a bit.

"Give me a moment, Timmo."

"Charlie, are you all right?"

"Christ, yes! I breathed in a little dust, that's all." He knelt, rummaged in the tool sack, pulled out a canteen, took a deep drink. "Better," he said hoarsely. "Want some?" I took the canteen from him and he

leaned into the opening again, flashing the beam around.

"What do you see?"

"Nothing. Not a fucking thing."

"They put up a marble slab and plaster it with inscribed seals and there's nothing at all behind it?"

"A hole," he said. "Maybe five feet deep, five feet high. A storage chamber of some kind, I would guess. Nothing in it. Absolutely fucking nothing, bro."

"Let me see."

"Don't you trust me?"

In fact I didn't, not very much. But I just shrugged, and he handed me the flashlight, and I peered into the hole. Charlie was right. The interior of the chamber was smooth and regular, but it was empty, not the slightest trace of anything.

"Shit," Charlie said. He shook his head somberly. "My very own Tutankhamen tomb, only nothing's in it. Let's get the hell out of here."

"Are you going to report this?"

"What for? I come in after hours, conduct illicit explorations, and all I have to show for my sins is an empty hole? What's the good of telling anybody that? Just for the sake of making myself look like an unethical son of a bitch? No, bro. None of this ever happened."

"But the seals — the inscriptions in an unknown script —"

"Not important. Let's go, Tim."

He still sounded angry, and not, I think, just because the little chamber behind the marble slab had been empty. Something had gotten to him just now, and gotten to him deeply. Had he heard the weird music too? Had he looked into that fathomless well? He hated all mystery, everything inexplicable. I think that was why he had become an archaeologist. Mysteries had a way of unhooking him. When I was maybe ten and he was thirteen, we had spent a rainy evening telling each other ghost stories, and finally we made one up together, something about spooks from another world who were haunting our attic, and our own story scared me so much that I began to cry. I imagined I heard strange creaks overhead. Charlie mocked me mercilessly, but it seemed to me that for a time he had looked a little nervous too, and when I said so he got very annoyed indeed. Then, bluffing all the way, I invited him to come up to the

WE STARED INTO THE blackest of black holes. Ancient musty air came roaring forth. Charlie leaned forward and poked the flashlight inside...

attic with me right then and there to see that it was safe, and he punched me in the chest and knocked me down. Later he denied the whole episode.

"I'm sorry I wasted your time tonight, kid," he said, as we hiked back up to our cars.

"That's OK. It just might have been something special."

"Just might have been, yeah." He grinned and winked. He was himself again, old devil-may-care Charlie. "Sleep tight, bro. See you in the morning."

But I didn't sleep tight at all. I kept waking and hearing the wailing sound of far-off elevator cables, and my dreams were full of blurry strangenesses.

THE NEXT DAY I HUNG out at the hotel all day, breakfasting with Charlie — he didn't refer to the events of the night before at all — and lounging by the pool the rest of the time. I had some vague thought of hooking up with one of the German tourist ladies, I suppose, but no openings presented themselves, and I contented myself with watching the show. Even in puritanical Turkey, where the conservative politicians are trying to put women back into veils and ankle-length skirts, European women of all ages casually go topless at coastal resorts like this, and it was remarkable to see how much *savoir-faire* the Turkish poolside waiters displayed while taking bar orders from saftig bare-breasted grandmothers from Hamburg or Munich and their stunning, topless granddaughters.

Mr. Gladstone, who hadn't been around in the morning, turned up in late afternoon. I was in the lobby bar by then, working on my third or fourth post-lunch *raki*. He looked sweaty and tired and sunburned. I ordered a Coke for him.

"Busy day?"

"Very. The Cave of the Seven Sleepers was my first stop. A highly emotional experience, I have to say, not because of the cave itself, you understand, although the ancient ruined church there is quite interesting, but because — the associations — the memories of my dear wife that it summoned —"

"Of course."

"After that my driver took me out to the so-called House of the Virgin. Perhaps it's genuine, perhaps not, but either way it's a moving thing to see. The invisible presence of thousands of pilgrims hovers over it, the aura of centuries of faith." He smiled gently. "Do you know what I mean, Mr. Walker?"

"I think I do, yes."

"And in the afternoon I saw the Basilica of St. John, on Ayasuluk Hill."

I didn't know anything about that. He explained that it was the acropolis of the old Byzantine city — the steep hill just across the main highway from the center of the town of Seljuk. Legend had it that St. John the Apostle had been buried up there, and centuries later the Emperor Justinian built an enormous church on the site, which was, of course, a ruin now, but an impressive one.

"And you?" he said. "You visited with your brother?"

"In the morning, yes."

"A brilliant man, your brother. If only he could be happier, eh?"

"Oh, I think Charlie's happy, all right. He's had his own way every step of his life."

"Is that your definition of happiness? Having your own way?"

"It can be very helpful."

"And you haven't had your own way, is that it, Mr. Walker?"

"My life has been reasonably easy by most people's standards, I have to admit. I was smart enough to pick a wealthy great-grandfather. But compared with Charlie — he has an extraordinary mind, he's had a splendid scientific career, he's admired by all the members of his profession. I don't even have a profession, Mr. Gladstone. I just float around."

"You're young, Mr. Walker. You'll find something to do and someone to share your life with, and you'll settle down. But your brother — I wonder, Mr. Walker. Something vital is missing from his life. But he will never find it, because he is not willing to admit that it's missing."

"Religion, do you mean?"

"Not specifically, no. Belief, perhaps. Not religion, but belief. Do you follow me, Mr. Walker? One must believe in something, do you see? And your brother will not permit himself to do that." He gave me the gentle smile again. "Would you excuse me, now? I've had a rather strenuous day. I think a little nap, before supper —"

Since we were the only two Americans in the place, I invited him to join me again for dinner that night. He did most of the talking, reminiscing about

his wife, telling me about his children — he had three, in his thirties — and describing some of the things he had seen in his tour of the Biblical places. I had never spent much time with anyone of his sort. A kindly man, an earnest man, and, I suspect, not quite as simple a man as a casual observer might think.

He went upstairs about half past eight. I returned to the bar and had a couple of raw Turkish brandies and thought hopeful thoughts about the stunning German granddaughters. Somewhere about ten, as I was considering going to bed, a waiter appeared and said, "You are Mr. Timothy Walker?"

"Yes."

"Your brother Charlie is at the security gate and asks that you come out to meet him."

Mystified, I went rushing out into the courtyard. The hotel grounds are locked down every night and nobody is admitted except guests and the guests of guests. I saw the glare of headlights just beyond the gate. Charlie's car.

"What's up, bro?"

His eyes were wild. He gestured at me with furious impatience. "In. In!" Almost before I closed the door he spun the car around and was zooming down the narrow, winding road back to Seljuk. He was hunched over the wheel in the most peculiar rigid way.

"Charlie?"

"Exactly what did you experience," he said tightly, "when we pulled that marble slab out of the wall?"

My reply was carefully vague.

"Tell me," he said. "Be very precise."

"I don't want you to laugh at me, Charlie."

"Just tell me."

I took a deep breath. "Well, then. I imagined that I heard far-off music. I had a kind of vision of — well, someplace weird and mysterious. I thought I smelled perfume. The whole thing lasted maybe half a second and then it was over."

He was silent a moment.

Then he said, in a strange little quiet way, "It was the same for me, bro."

"You denied it. I asked you, and you said no, Charlie."

BUT I DIDN'T SLEEP TIGHT at all. I kept waking and hearing the wailing sound of far-off elevator cables, and my dreams were full of blurry strangenesses.

"Well, I lied. It was the same for me." His voice had become very odd — thin, tight, quavering. Everything about him right now was tight. Something had to pop. The car was traveling at maybe eighty miles an hour on that little road and I feared for my life. After a very long time he said, "Do you think there's any possibility, Tim, that we might have let something out of that hole in the ground when we broke those seals and pulled that slab out?"

I stared at him. "That's crazy, Charlie."

"I know it is. Just answer me: Do you think we felt something moving past us as we opened that chamber?"

"Hey, we're too old to be telling each other spook stories, bro."

"I'm being serious."

"Bullshit you are," I said. "I hate it when you play with me like this."

"I'm not playing," Charlie said, and he turned around so that he was practically facing me for a moment. His face was twisted with strain. "Timmo, some goddamned thing that looks awfully much like Diana of Ephesus has been walking around in the ruins since sundown. Three people have seen her that I know of. Three very reliable people."

I couldn't believe that he was saying stuff like this. Not Charlie.

"Keep your eyes on the road, will you?" I told him. "You'll get us killed driving like that."

"Do you know how much it costs me to say these things? Do you know how lunatic it sounds to me? But she's real. She's there. She was sealed up in that hole, and we let her out. The foreman of the excavations has seen her, and Judy, the staff artist, and Mike Dornan, the ceramics guy."

"They're fucking with your head, Charlie. Or you're fucking with mine."

"No. No. No. No."

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"To look for her. To find out what the hell it is that those people think they saw. I've got to know, Tim. This time, I've absolutely got to know."

The desperation in Charlie's voice was something new in my experience of him. I've absolutely got to know. Why? Why? It was all too crazy. And dragging me out like this — why? To bear witness? To help him prove to himself that he actually was seeing the thing that he was seeing, if indeed he saw it? Or, maybe, to help him convince himself that there was nothing there to see?

But he wasn't going to see anything. I was sure of that.

"Charlie," I said. "Oh, Charlie, Charlie, Charlie, this isn't happening, is it? Not really."

WE PULLED UP OUTSIDE THE MAIN GATE OF THE RUINS. A WATCHMAN was posted there, a Turk. He stepped quickly aside as Charlie went storming through into the site. I saw flashlights glowing in the distance, and then four or five American-looking people. Charlie's colleagues, the archaeologists.

"Well?" Charlie yelled. He sounded out of control.

A frizzy-haired woman of about forty came up from somewhere to our left. She looked as wild-eyed and agitated as Charlie. For the first time I began to think this might not be just some goofy practical joke.

"Heading east," the woman blurted. "Toward the stadium or maybe all the way out to the goddess sanctuary. Dick saw it too. And Edward thinks he did."

"Anybody get a photo?"

"Not that I know of," the woman said.

"Come on," Charlie said to me, and went running off at an angle to the direction we had just come. Frantically I chased after him. He

was chugging uphill, into the thorny scrub covering the unexcavated areas of the city. By moonlight I saw isolated shattered pillars rising from the ground like broken teeth, and tumbledown columns that had been tossed around like so many toothpicks. As I came alongside him he said, "There's a little sanctuary of the Mother Goddess back there. Wouldn't that be the logical place that she'd want to go to?"

"For shit's sake, Charlie! What are you saying?"

He kept on running, giving me no answer. I fought my way up the hill through a tangle of brambles and canes that slashed at me like daggers, all the while wondering what the hell we were going to find on top. We were halfway up when shouts came to us from down the hill, people behind us waving and pointing. Charlie halted and listened, frowning. Then he swung around and started sprinting back down the hill. "She's gone outside the ruins," he called to me over his shoulder. "Through the fence, heading into town! Come on, Tim!"

I went running after him, scrambling downhill, then onward along the main entrance road and onto the main highway. I'm in good running shape, but Charlie was moving with a maniacal zeal that left me hard pressed to keep up with him. Twenty feet apart, we came pounding down the road, past the museum and into town. All the dinky restaurants were open, even this late, and little knots of Turks had emerged from them to gather in the crossroads. Some were kneeling in prayer, hammering their heads against the pavement, and others were wildly gesticulating at one another in obvious shock and bewilderment. Charlie, without breaking stride, called out to them in guttural Turkish and got a whole babble of replies.

"Ayasuluk Hill," he said to me. "That's the direction she's going in."

We crossed the broad boulevard that divides the town in half. As we passed the bus station half a dozen men came running out of a side street in front of us, screaming as though they had just been disemboweled. You don't expect to hear adult male Turks screaming,

They are a nation of tough people, by and large. These fellows went flying past us without halting, big men with thick black mustaches. Their eyes were wide and gleaming like beacons, their faces rigid and distended with shock and horror, as though twenty devils were coming after them.

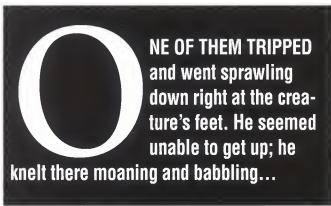
"Charlie —"

"Look there," he said, in an utterly flat voice, and pointed into the darkness.

Something — *something* — was moving away from us down that side street, something very tall and very strange. I saw a tapering conical body, a hint of weird appendages, a crackling blue-white aura. It seemed to be floating rather than walking, carried along by a serene but inexorable drifting motion almost as if its feet were several inches off the ground. Maybe they were.

As we watched, the thing halted and peered into the open window of a house. There was a flash of blinding light, intense but short-lived. Then the front door popped open and a bunch of frantic Turks came boiling out like a pack of Keystone Cops, running in sixty directions at once, yelling and flinging their arms about as though trying to surrender.

One of them tripped and went sprawling down right at the creature's feet. He seemed unable to get up; he knelt there all bunched up, moaning and babbling, shielding his face with outspread hands. The thing paused and looked down, and seemed to reach its arms out in fluid gestures, and the blue-white glow spread for a moment



like a mantle over the man. Then the light withdrew from him and the creature, gliding smoothly past the trembling fallen man, continued on its serene silent way toward the dark hill that loomed above the town.

"Come," Charlie said to me.

We went forward. The creature had disappeared ahead, though we caught occasional glimpses of the blue-white light as it passed between the low little buildings of the town. We reached the man who had tripped; he had not arisen, but lay face down, shivering, covering his head with his hands. A low rumbling moan of fear came steadily from him. From in front of us, hoarse cries of terror drifted to us from here and there as one villager or another encountered the thing that was passing through their town, and now and again we could see that cool bright light, rising steadily above us until finally it was shining down from the upper levels of Ayasuluk Hill.

"You really want to go up there?" I asked him.

He didn't offer me an answer, nor did he stop moving forward. I wasn't about to turn back either, I realized. Willy-nilly I followed him to the end of the street, around a half-ruined mosque at the base of the hill, and up to a lofty metal gate tipped with spikes. Stoned on our own adrenaline, we swarmed up that gate like Crusaders attacking a Saracen fortress, went over the top, dropped down in the bushes on the far side. I was able to see, by the brilliant gleam of the full moon, the low walls of the destroyed Basilica of St. John just beyond, and, behind it, the massive Byzantine fortification that crowned the hill. Together we scrambled toward the summit.

"You go this way, Tim. I'll go the other and we'll meet on the far side."

"Right."

I didn't know what I was looking for. I just ran around the hill, along the ramparts, into the church, down the empty aisles, out the gaping window-frames.

Suddenly I caught a glimpse of something up ahead. Light, cool white light, an unearthly light very much like moonlight, only concentrated into a fiercely gleaming point hovering a couple of yards above the ground, thirty or forty feet in front of me.

"Charlie?" I called. My voice was no more than a hoarse gasp.

I edged forward. The light was so intense now that I was afraid it might damage my eyes. But I continued to stare, as if the thing would disappear if I were to blink for even a millionth of a second.

I heard the wailing music again.

Soft, distant, eerie. Cables rubbing together in a dark shaft. This time it seemed to be turned outward, rising far beyond me, reaching into distant space or perhaps some even more distant dimension. Something calling, announcing its regained freedom, summoning — whom? What?

"Charlie?" I said. It was a barely audible croak. "Charlie?"

I noticed him now, edging up from the other side. I pointed at the source of the light. He nodded.

I moved closer. The light seemed to change, to grow momentarily fiercer. And then I was able to see her.

She wasn't exactly identical to the statues in the museum. Her face wasn't really a face, at least not a human one. She had beady eyes, faceted the way an insect's are. She had an extra set of arms, little dangling ones, coming out at her hips. And, though the famous breasts were there, at least fifty of them and maybe the hundred of legend, I don't think they were actual breasts because I don't think

this creature was a mammal. More of a reptile, I would guess, with leathery skin, more or less as scaly as a snake's, and tiny dots of nostrils, and a black slithery tongue, jagged like a lightning bolt, that came shooting quickly out between her slitted lips again and again and again, as though checking on the humidity or the ambient temperature or some such thing.

I saw, and Charlie saw. For a fraction of a second I wanted to drop down on my knees and rub my forehead in the ground and give worship. And then I just wanted to run.

I said, "Charlie, I definitely think we ought to get the hell out of—"

"Cool it, bro," he said. He stepped forward. Walked right up to her, stared her in the face. I was terrified for him, seeing him get that close. She dwarfed him. He was like a doll in front of her. How had a thing this big managed to fit in that opening in the tunnel wall? How had those ancient Greeks ever managed to get her in there in the first place?

That dazzling light cracked and hissed around her like some sort of electrical discharge. And yet Charlie stood his ground, unflinching, rock-solid. The expression on my brother's face was a nearly incomprehensible mixture of anger and fear.

He jabbed his forefinger through the air at her.

"You," he said to her. It was almost a snarl. "Tell me what the hell you are."

They were maybe ten feet apart, the man and the — what? The goddess? The monster?

Charlie had to know.

"You speak English?" he demanded. "Turkish? Tell me. I'm the one who let you out of that hole. Tell me what you are. I want to know." Eye to eye, face to face. "Something from another planet, are you, maybe? Another dimension? An ancient race that used to live on the Earth before humans did?"

"Charlie," I whispered.

But he wouldn't let up. "Or maybe you're an actual and literal goddess," he said. His tone had turned softer, a mocking croon now. "Diana of Ephesus, is that who you are? Stepping right out of the pages of mythology in all your fantastic beauty? Well, do me some magic, goddess, if that's who you are. Do a miracle for me, just a little one." The angry edge was back in his voice. "Turn that tree into an elephant. Turn me into a sheep, if you can. What's the matter, Diana, you no spikka da English? All right. Why the hell should you? But how about Greek, then? Surely you can understand Greek."

"For Christ's sake, Charlie —"

He ignored me. It was as if I wasn't there. He was talking to her in Greek, now. I suppose it was Greek. It was harsh, thick-sounding, jaggedly rhythmic. His eyes were wild and his face was flushed with fury. I was afraid that she would hurl a thunderbolt of blue-white light at him, but no, no, she just stood there through all his whole harangue, as motionless as those statues of her in the little museum, listening patiently as my furious brother went on and on and on at her in the language of Homer and Sophocles.

He stopped, finally. Waited as if expecting her to respond.

No response came. I could hear the whistling sound of her slow steady breathing. Occasionally there was some slight movement of her body, but that was all.

"Well, Diana?" Charlie said. "What do you have to say for yourself, Diana?"

Silence.

**HE STEPPED FORWARD.
Walked right up to her.
I was terrified for him,
seeing him get that
close. She dwarfed
him. He was like a doll in front of her.**

"You fraud!" Charlie cried, in a great and terrible voice. "You fake! Some goddess you are! You aren't real at all, and that's God's own truth. You aren't even here. You're nothing but a fucking hallucination. A projection of some kind. I bet I could walk up to you and put my hand right through you."

Still no reaction. Nothing. She just stood there, those faceted eyes glittering, that little tongue flickering. Saying nothing, offering him no help.

That was when he flipped out. Charlie seemed to puff up as if about to explode with rage, and went rushing toward her, arms upraised, fists clenched in a wild gesture of attack. I wanted desperately to stop him, but my feet were frozen in place. I was certain that he was going to die. We both were.

"Damn you!" he roared, with something like a sob behind the fury. "Damn you, damn you, damn you!"

But before he could strike her, her aura flared up around her like a sheath, and for a moment the air was full of brilliant flares of cold flame that went whirling and whirling around her in a way that was too painful to watch. I caught a glimpse of Charlie staggering back from her, and I backed away myself, covering my face with my forearm, but even so the whirling lights came stabbing into my brain, forcing me to the ground. It seemed then that they all coalesced into a single searing point of white light, which rose like a dagger into the sky, climbing, climbing, becoming something almost like a comet, and — then —

Vanishing.

And then I blanked out.

It was just before dawn when I awakened. My eyes fluttered open almost hesitantly. The moon was gone, the first pink streaks of light were beginning to appear. Charlie sat beside me. He was already awake.

"Where is it?" I asked immediately.

"Gone, bro."

"Gone?"

He nodded. "Without a trace. If it ever was up here with us at all."

"What do you mean, if?"

"If, that's what I mean. Who the hell knows what was going on up here last night? Do you?"

"No."

"Well, neither do I. All I know is that it isn't going on any more. There's nobody around but me and thee."

He was trying to sound like the old casual Charlie I knew, the man who had been everywhere and done everything and took it all in his stride. But there was a quality in his voice that I had never heard in it before, something entirely new.

"Gone?" I said, stupidly. "Really gone?"

"Really gone, yes. Vanished. You hear how quiet everything is?"

Indeed the town, spread out below us, was silent except for the crowing of the first roosters and the far-off sound of a farm tractor starting up somewhere.

"Are you all right?" I asked him.

"Fine," he said. "Absolutely fine."

But he said it through clenched teeth. I couldn't bear to look at him. A thing had happened here that badly needed explanation, and no explanations were available, and I knew what that must be doing to him. I kept staring at the place where that eerie being had been, and I remembered that single shaft of light that had taken its place, and I felt a crushing sense of profound and terrible loss. Something strange and weirdly beautiful and utterly fantastic and inex-

plorable had been loose in the world for a little while, after centuries of — what? Imprisonment? Hibernation? — and now it was gone, and it would never return. It had known at once, I was sure, that this was no era for goddesses. Or whatever it was.

We sat side by side in silence for a minute or two.

"I think we ought to go back down now," I said finally.

"Right. Let's go back down," Charlie said.

And without saying another word as we descended, we made our way down the hill of Ayasuluk, the hill of St. John the Apostle, who was the man who wrote the Book of Revelations.

MR. GLADSTONE WAS HAVING BREAKFAST IN THE HOTEL COFFEE shop when Charlie and I came in. He saw at once that something

was wrong and asked if he could help in any way, and after some hesitation we told him something of what had happened, and then we told him more, and then we told him the whole story right to the end.

He didn't laugh and he didn't make any sarcastic skeptical comments. He took it all quite seriously.

"Perhaps the Seal of Solomon was what was on that marble slab," he suggested. "The Turks

would say some such thing, at any rate. King Solomon had power over the evil jinn, and locked them away in flasks and caves and tombs, and put his seal on them to keep them locked up. It's in the Koran."

"You've read the Koran?" I asked, surprised.

"I've read a lot of things," said Mr. Gladstone.

"The Seal of Solomon," Charlie said, scowling. He was trying hard to be his old self again, and almost succeeding. Almost. "Evil spirits. Magic. Oh, Jesus Christ!"

"Perhaps," said Mr. Gladstone.

"What?" Mr. Gladstone.

The little man from Ohio or Indiana or Iowa put his hand over Charlie's. "If only I could help you," he said. "But you've been undone, haven't you, by the evidence of things seen."

"You have the quote wrong," said Charlie. "The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Book of Hebrews, 11:1."

Mr. Gladstone was impressed. So was I.

"But this is different," he said to Charlie. "This time, you actually saw. You were, I think, a man who prided himself on believing in nothing at all. But now you can no longer even believe in your own disbelief."

Charlie reddened. "Saw what? A goddess? Jesus! You think I believe that that was a goddess? A genuine immortal supernatural being of a higher order of existence? Or — what? — some kind of actual alien creature? You want me to believe it was an alien that had been locked up in there all that time? An alien from where? Mars? And who locked it up? Or was it one of King Solomon's jinn, maybe?"

"Does it really matter which it was?" Mr. Gladstone asked softly.

Charlie started to say something, but he choked it back. After a moment he stood. "Listen, I need to go now," he said. "Mr. Gladstone — Timmo — I'll catch up with you later, is that all right?"

And then he turned and stalked away. But before he left, I saw the look in his eyes.

His eyes. Oh, Charlie. Oh. Those eyes. Those frightened, empty eyes. ♣

CHARLIE SEEMED TO PUFF up as if about to explode with rage, and went rushing toward her, arms upraised, fists clenched in a wild gesture of attack.



*The gods speak through whomever they wish,
but it's up to the listener to determine
the truth of their words.*

PACIFICA

ON THE NIGHT Kahuna was born, Manu Pueo, the owl from Hawaii's Thunder Mountains, swooped down from its perch in a nearby palm and frightened away the women attending the one who was becoming his mother. That lady squatted in the moonless dark, sheltered by a small grove of coconut palms. She was aware of the danger, but she was unwilling to move and thereby risk the death of her baby. Mele had witnessed her thirtieth harvest season and had long ago acknowledged, if not accepted her position as Kelolo the Fisherman's barren first wife. From the first month in which she shed no woman's blood and thereby avoided kapu, she had known the child she carried was male, a son destined for greatness.

Frightened, abandoned by her midwives and racked by the pain of the child's coming, Kahuna's mother faced Manu Pueo alone.

A day and a half later, Mele walked out of the palm grove toward the village with her son at her breast. The women rushed to meet her, staring with horror and admiration at the striations left by the owl's talons across her thighs and belly. In sparse and heartfelt terms, for Mele was a fisherman's wife and not a storyteller, she related how the owl attacked her and how she had pleaded with it to spare her child. She told how the owl settled to the ground, folded its wings and backed away without harming her as she gave birth. Then she told how the owl spoke to her, said it was old and dying and needed a soul to inhabit; finally, she told how she pitied the owl and held out her son to it and gave it permission to share her son's soul.

This was the strangest talk the women of the village had ever heard, but they agreed that Kelolo and his wife were specially blessed with mana and their son who held the owl's spirit, doubly so. The men of the village heard the cries of their women and came forward. They demanded that Mele tell them her story. She related it to them, and again to the high chief, and finally to the king himself, though she was forbidden to address the king directly and instead recited the events of the child's birth to a large boulder in the compound used by the king during his infrequent visits to the village, while he hid himself behind it and listened. The most powerful priest in the village was summoned for advice. The man consulted the omens, entreated the gods to show their will, and after

BY JULIE STEVENS
Illustration by Carol Heyer

much chanting and burning of sacrifices announced that a boy with the soul of an owl inside him must have great powers of prophecy and should be carefully trained in the use of his gift. The fisherman's son was not given a proper name, but called simply Kahuna, which could mean any priest or holy man; yet so far did the fame of his birth spread among the islands that unless a kahuna was referred to by another given name, it was assumed the owl-boy was meant.

Kahuna did not know just when he understood the extent of his mana. Certainly he was never without the knowledge that he was different. But he first remembered hearing of the owl that shared his soul just after his fourth harvest. That was when Kelolo came to take him from his mother's house. But instead of taking the boy to the men's lodge Kelolo shared with Kahuna's half-brothers, he led his son around the mud-laden Taro beds and down the beach to a hut belonging to Kuokoa, the most powerful kahuna in the village, and the man who would know what the gods had in store for the owl-boy.

Kahuna had always known he would be a priest; but now, as his father released him into the care of Kuokoa, Kahuna realized his training was to begin immediately. He wondered if his mother had had any say in the matter, for he was very young to be apprenticed. Although he saw her upon occasion after that, he never asked her, nor did she give him any hint.

KAHUNA STAYED WITH KUOKOA FOR twelve years. He tended the priest's fires, cooked his meals, and accompanied him on long journeys into the mountains to gather the materials a kahuna needs to make successful magic against malevolent spirits. Kahuna practiced faithfully until he could chant incantations against four hundred evils, more even than Kuokoa could remember without resorting to his memorysticks. Kuokoa told his charge that the nature of the owl spirit was the gift of prophecy. He sat in long vigils with Kahuna and carved many special charms by the light of a kikiu lamp to help the boy corral the spirit and use its gift wisely.

Kahuna made his first prophecy during his tenth makahiki. Since makahiki was a festival in honor of Lono, who governed growing things and brought joy and peace, Kuokoa had prepared a fine chant to entertain the crowds. But the king demanded more. He had waited a long time to return to this poor village and he wanted to see something from the owl-boy. Kuokoa shook his head and made powerful magic. He did not think his pupil was ready but neither could he disobey a direct order from the king.

So, Kahuna prophesied. He leaned his head back and closed his eyes and said what first came into his thoughts. He said that the coming storm would bring a terrible destruction, worse than any in memory. There was a storm on the horizon, though it appeared no different than any other harvest storm. But the owl-boy's words were heeded and the festivities quickly ended. After the poi, salted fish, and pandanus flour were sealed into watertight containers and placed underground, the villagers gathered their possessions and moved into the shallow caves along the base of the inland mountain range to await the storm.

Yet when the storm came, it passed as any minor gale would. People glared at Kahuna from their cramped quarters and muttered under their breath. Even his own mother looked upon him with sadness rather than faith. He wondered if she thought the owl spirit had abandoned her son.

But close upon the first storm came another, and the chiefs ordered everyone back into the caverns. This time, the winds peaked in such fury as had seldom been seen in the islands; the waves covered the rocky beaches and reached across the palm groves to suck the roots from the taro beds. Boulders the size of a child were flung into the trees. When the storm was over, only one hut remained standing, and that was the one belonging to Kuokoa and Kahuna. From this did the people know that Kahuna and the owl were truly one.

Kuokoa had much to teach his apprentice. The elderly priest was consulted by almost everyone in the village for advice, for healing powders and potions, for intercession with the spirits. To his people, it appeared that Kuokoa knew everything, even those things they thought had been kept secret. Yet, while Kahuna was Kuokoa's willing pupil, he was puzzled by him, too, for it seemed that not all that the man taught was worthy of a kahuna. The intricately carved sticks the priest waved about as he performed his chants were memory guides which he used to recall the exact sequence of the chant, all the while appearing to be inspired by the gods themselves. Kuokoa listened carefully to what even the smallest child had to say, and by the quietness of his presence was often unnoticed by the villagers. In this way, he learned much that he would use again when a man or woman came to him for magic. But any man might observe and later couch his observations in such flights of language and clouds of smoke as to convince a lesser man that magic is in the air; that does not render illusion into reality, and Kahuna was greatly disturbed at how often Kuokoa resorted to these tricks. For himself, Kahuna refused to be a party to them. He held himself apart from the villagers, and when they came to him for prophecy, he gave it to them truly, scarcely changing the pattern he had begun as a boy at that tenth makahiki. Men asked whom they should marry, and he told them. Women asked where to plant their crops for the most fruitful harvest, and he told them. Chiefs came to him with their battle plans and never marched against an enemy but that Kahuna had selected the most auspicious date. The owl spirit filled him until it seemed that he could not talk without casting the future.

He continued to live with Kuokoa, but all was not well between them. Kahuna was self-righteous in his gift, and scornful of the devices Kuokoa used to compete. He lacked the patience to humor his teacher, and more and more it seemed to Kahuna that his village deserved a priest without tricks, a priest whom Manu Pueo had marked as his own. He spoke to Kuokoa of these things, for he did not want to conspire against the man without his knowledge. But Kuokoa counseled forbearance. Many times, he told Kahuna that for all of the owl's gift, Kahuna had not sufficiently developed his skill at prophecy. This, Kahuna knew to be nonsense. The proof of his skill lay in the bountiful harvests, the successful marriages, the victorious battles of the village.

THEN, DURING KUOKOA'S SIXTIETH harvest and Kahuna's twentieth, the elderly priest challenged his student to match chants with him, one for one until he or the apprentice lost memory. The owl inside Kahuna told him he would win, though mere observation would have told him as much. He slept on the mats beside Kuokoa and he heard the terrible coughing in the middle of the night which none of his potions could cure. He knew that Kuokoa relied more and more on his memorysticks not just for his chants, but for his magic, and often left out parts that were crucial to the success of his charms. The time had come for Kahuna to take his place as the most powerful kahuna in the village. Most of the people already knew his skill was greater than Kuokoa's, but now the old man gave Kahuna the chance to confirm it publicly. Kahuna was not completely comfortable with his decision to accept the challenge, but he assuaged his guilt by allowing Kuokoa the full measure of his tricks. He pretended that the memorysticks were mere charms and let Kuokoa carry them into the village where the contest was to be held. The people gathered around them as first Kuokoa invoked one god, and then Kahuna another. A day passed, a night, and part of another day. Kahuna was exhausted and exhilarated, filled to overflowing with the owl spirit, and when Kuokoa at last bowed his head in defeat, Kahuna drove his triumph home with the force of a full dozen more chants.

Afterward Kuokoa was very sick. He stayed in his hut and forbade Kahuna to enter, though Kahuna made all manner of enchantments out-

side it, beseeching the gods to let his teacher live. Still, he foresaw that Kuokoa would die soon. Moreover, Kahuna realized the old man never intended to win their priestly battle. But with the public duel, he left Kahuna behind as a master who had brought another master to defeat.

It happened as Kahuna knew it would, and a great funeral was held for Kuokoa. The priest's flesh was baked from his bones and the bones were given to Kahuna for hiding in some secret place where his enemies might never find him. Kahuna had chosen the place with care. It was a deep rift in the Thunder Mountains where steep canyon walls closed overhead to form a cavern so long that he had never explored it to its very end.

Kahuna fasted for three days and offered to the gods all the death prayers Kuokoa had taught him. Then he gathered Kuokoa's bones in a bundle of kapa cloth and left the village. High into the pleated mountains he walked, and, as he did so, he remembered all the times he had accompanied Kuokoa along these same leaf-shaded paths. It was during this final journey with his old friend that Kahuna's often-harsh evaluation of Kuokoa softened. Fraud or not, Kuokoa had taught him how to tame the owl's soul and use its gift for prophecy; Kahuna would always be grateful. If his mentor sometimes resorted to tricks, then it was because the old priest's mana was not strong—an accident of fate, and nothing to bring shame.

When Kahuna found the entrance to his hiding place, he pulled out a candle of oily kikuinut meats stuck on the end of a long stick, one of many he had carefully hidden, together with a fireplow, near these caverns. He made the fire to light his way and entered the darkness in search of the best resting place for the bones of Kuokoa.

The air inside the cave was thick and suffocating, though cold. He had not noticed this in his prior visits but neither had he ventured so deeply into the cavern. His candle sputtered and appeared about to die at any moment. He sheltered the flame with his hand and walked carefully among the stones that littered the floor. Intent upon protecting his light and his footing, he almost dropped the packet of bones. He should not have fasted, he thought; it made him weaker than he had intended. The one chosen to secret the body of a chief or a priest was hardly ever the same one who delivered the enchantments necessary to ensure a peaceful afterlife.

HE FINALLY HALTED ON THE EDGE of a small, dark body of water. There was a narrow path along one side of it, but Kahuna was tired and he thought it unlikely that anyone would search this far into the cave, if it were found at all. He tasted the water and was pleased to discover the sweetness of a spring-fed pond. Even more to his pleasure was the discovery of fish in the pond. He had chosen a good place for Kuokoa, a place where the gods themselves provided ample food and drink. He placed Kuokoa's bones on a small ledge overlooking the pond. Then he knelt beside the water to drink. He found he could catch the fish with his bare hands. They were small and unlike other freshwater fish he was used to eating. Oddest of all, the fish had no eyes. Scales were drawn tight and smooth across the head where the eyes should be. He caught several fish, cupping them gently in his hands as he inspected them. Not one had eyes, and, after much thought, Kahuna realized this was a particularly good sign that Kuokoa's bones were buried in a safe place. He wondered for a moment if eating such creatures would be right, but his hunger was great and he did not feel that any harm could result.

After he had eaten his fill, the young priest fell asleep on the stony ground beside the pond. But the owl inside him was restless and filled his sleep with dreams. He dreamt of floating islands that sailed from place to place, carrying people dressed more oddly than the strangest trader. He saw his people greet the new arrivals as gods, and saw at once that it was a terrible mistake. He watched as his

people fell out of favor with the true gods and were afflicted with terrible diseases, such as no islander had ever experienced. This and more, the owl showed him until Kahuna awoke, shaken and screaming, in the darkness of the cave.

He sat for a long while, pondering the meaning of these events. When he tried to rise, dizziness overtook him, and he fell, retching, back to the cavern floor. When his stomach spasms ceased, he forced himself to his feet a second time and managed to remain upright. He had to leave; it would be an inauspicious sign if he were to be sick in Kuokoa's final resting place.

He left the cavern, stumbling through the darkness, breathing the harsh air. By the time he reached the entrance, he was still very ill, but he felt he understood something of his peculiar dream. He, who was blessed not only with the soul of an owl but with all its fortune and mana, and thus had become a prophet, had now found the place where his island kept its mana. Because Kahuna was a prophet with the owl's soul, he was shown not just his own future, nor the future of his village, but that of his entire world.

Kahuna's journey down the mountain was hampered by his physical weakness. He was becoming light-headed; none of the chants for protection from illness seemed to be working. Or in his tiredness, maybe he forgot parts that he thought were long ago committed to memory. He forced himself to keep his goal clear. He had to share his new-found knowledge with the king. Contained within his dreams was a warning that only he could deliver. And the cavern must be declared kapu and protected from desecration.

Just before he struck out across the small grassy plain that surrounded his village, he looked back at the Thunder Mountains. The yellow-green leaves of the Kikui trees against the hazy blue-gray of the mountains were a thing of beauty; they hid well the secret of the mountain cavern. After that, he faintly.

KAHUNA AWOKE INSIDE HIS OWN hut, but it was an uncertain awakening and he could not be sure if what he saw or heard was an illusion or reality. There was another kahuna, who chanted softly in one corner and was busily mixing potions in a carved bowl. He must have been very sick indeed if his people had sent all the way to Maui for this kahuna to attend him. It occurred to Kahuna that he might die. He searched himself and asked the owl spirit to tell him if this was so, but he could not find the answer. He was afraid he would die with no one knowing what he had learned in the cavern, so he began to tell the kahuna. The older man looked at Kahuna once or twice as though he heard his patient, but was uninterested in what Kahuna had to say. Kahuna tried to make the man understand. He told him of the floating islands filled with grizzled, light-skinned people who would one day come to their beautiful island. He warned the foreign kahuna that these were people, not gods, and that they would bring great destruction if the islanders were not careful. He told the man of weapons that spewed fire, and blades stronger than their best stone knives. He pushed away the potion the priest tried to force between his lips, and begged him to listen. But Kahuna could see the man thought the words were born in fever and gave them no value.

The Maui priest left and Kahuna could hear him chanting loudly outside his hut. Some time later, near morning Kahuna guessed, his mother came to him. She held many charms in her hand, all of them in the shape of owls. She looked so exhausted that he wondered if she had slept at all since his return. He could not be sure how long it had been since his journey into the Thunder Mountains. He tried to speak to her, but his throat burned with the effort and he made only coarse, grating noises.

While he stared at her through fever-glazed eyes Mele turned her charms over and over between her fingers. Then she began her own

Continued on page 81

*Tools are shaped to their user's hands, and can be deadly
in the hands of others.*

DEUS TEX

BY JACK MCDEVITT
Illustration by Michael Dubisch

THE BUILDING WAS DARK, EXCEPT for a table lamp in the living room and a ruddy glow on the third floor. The light upstairs didn't give us any real concern because a lot of people leave a second light on when they go out.

I looked around at the railroad tracks and warehouses and freight terminals and wondered why anybody would want to live down here. But Armin Rankowski had.

At least he had until he walked in front of a truck. That had happened the previous evening. Hatch had seen the story, and had read that there were no known survivors. That meant nobody would be home until the county got its act together.

The telephone book listed his home address as 511 S. Eddy in Pemberton, a small industrial town just south of Houston. We found a partially refitted warehouse at



the address. It was three stories high, with new siding and a freshly painted front entrance and plants and curtains in the windows.

The ambiance was by no means luxurious, but it was of a higher order than we'd expected. "Definitely worthwhile," Toxie said.

We moved to the rear of the building, out of sight of the street. Hatch measured the window, levered it open, and poked his head in. "I think we're OK," he whispered. He threw a leg over the sill. Like the rest of him, it was big and meaty.

Toxie was little and sharp-nosed and rat-quick. He was good to have along because he scared easy, and you knew he wasn't going to let you take any chances. You might think excessive caution is not a good idea, but in our line of work, it is a virtue of the first order. He went next, and I followed.

I should point out here that it's always a rewarding moment to encounter a house of modest appearance and discover that the occupants have done well. We had entered the dining room, which was furnished with leather chairs and a nicely executed, hand-carved table that would look good in my den. Two impressionist oils hung on the walls, and we found another out in the hallway. They looked like originals, which presented a problem because they are awkward

"Wait a minute," I complained. "There's some nice stuff here." Hatch's eyes caught mine. "Carry it or forget it."

There was an elevator in the rear. We got in and punched the button for the second floor. It lurched, whined, moved up, and shuddered to a halt. The doors creaked open. We looked out at long shelves of books. We took a chance and used our flashlights.

A dozen sheets of paneling lay against one wall. The area was half-done. A newly installed bathroom still smelled of fresh-cut lumber.

I wandered through the rows of books. "Might be some first editions," I suggested.

Hatch nodded. "If there are, it'll take too much time to find them."

Several cardboard cartons were stacked along a far wall. "You want to open these?" asked Toxie, cutting a hole in one. "It looks like Christmas stuff."

Hatch shook his head. "I don't think so." We had never, in our careers, found anything of value in a storeroom.

At the front, we opened a pair of double doors and looked out on a wide staircase. The woodwork had been recently varnished, and it glittered in the moonlight. New carpet had been laid on the lower section.

THE THIRD FLOOR WAS ABOVE THE LEVEL OF THE street lights, which threw fragmented illumination against the ceiling. Two dim electric candles, mounted on either wall toward the front of the building, almost seemed to add to the darkness. We stepped off the elevator and waited for our eyes to adjust.

to carry and you can't be sure what they're worth, if anything. I've taken a couple of classes in contemporary art, in order to upgrade my professional skills, but they tend to deal exclusively with the people whose stuff hangs in museums.

"How about this?" said Toxie happily, surveying the furnishings. "We need a van."

Hatch was big and easy-going. He was career oriented in every sense of the term, and he took pride in the fact that neither he nor anyone accompanying him on an operation had ever been charged. He was at an age when most people are starting to think about retirement, and in fact he talked about it a lot. He'd invested his money, and I knew he could have turned off the lights any time he wanted. But Hatch could never be satisfied with sitting on a front porch. "Gentlemen," he said, maintaining the monotone he always used when he was working, "I believe we have just met the mortgage payment."

We moved through the first floor. There was enough light coming in from the street to allow us to work. The house was electronically well-equipped: TV, stereo, blender, microwave, everything was state-of-the-art. In addition, there was good silverware and a set of Dauvrie crystal bookends, a top-of-the-line Miranda camera, and a Zeos notebook. We found a tin box stashed in a cabinet in the dining room, under some folded table cloths. It contained about three hundred in cash, some cheap jewelry, a pair of diamond cufflinks, and a bundle of thousand-dollar bonds. Toxie and I carried black utility bags. We put the cufflinks and the cash into the bags and left the rest.

I knew Hatch was trying to decide about the van. There weren't many cops in this neighborhood, but anybody doing major removal at this hour would be fairly visible. "Maybe," I said, "we should just take what we can carry and come back in the morning for the rest."

"No." Hatch's eyes narrowed while he thought about it. "The county will be in here tomorrow. We'll take what we can carry tonight and that'll be it."

Toxie nodded approval.

Another set of double doors closed off the third floor.

"Probably an attic," I said. I was anxious to get back downstairs and start packing.

Hatch shook his head. "There's a light up there," he reminded me. "Let's take a look."

We walked back to the elevator.

The third floor was above the level of the street lights, which threw fragmented illumination against the ceiling. Two dim electric candles, mounted on either wall toward the front of the building, almost seemed to add to the darkness. We stepped off the elevator and waited for our eyes to adjust.

It looked as if there were a number of people standing quietly out on the warehouse floor. I sensed Toxie shifting his weight while we waited for the situation to resolve itself. After a moment I could see that the figures were cases or boxes. The illusion was caused by the fact that they were of different sizes and were distributed around the room in no particular order.

"Glass top," Hatch approached the nearest. He rapped his knuckles on it, produced his flashlight, and folded his hands around the lens to hide the glow. "Son of a bitch," he said.

Now I've got to tell you that Hatch was a good Christian and not generally given to that kind of language. But when I looked, I saw what had prompted the reaction. Lying inside the case, on a cushion that looked like satin, was a *seashell*. A *conch*.

The case was fitted with a lamp. I turned it on. It highlighted the shell, and Hatch extinguished the flashlight. "What's so special about this thing?" demanded Toxie.

I lifted the top and reached in, expecting to discover that it was jade or something. But it was only a shell. We looked at one another, and we were all thinking the same thing, that this Rankowski had been a nut.

We tried the next case. It held a white flute, also on a satin base. But this time it made a little sense. The flute was made of ivory, and would go for a nice piece of change. Hatch picked it up, checked to

make sure he hadn't set off an alarm somewhere, and handed it to Toxie. Toxie put it in the bag.

We moved on and found a gold sundisk, about the general size and shape of a CD, except that a chain was attached. Toxie took out his loupe, screwed it into his eye, and looked at it. "Might be," he said. "Far as I can tell, it looks real."

Into the bag.

Next up was a bushel basket made from balsa wood. Yet there it lay in a gleaming case, illuminated as if Jesus himself had carried it. Hatch shook his head.

"This place," said Toxie, "is starting to spook me." Hatch and I traded grins because it didn't take much to spook Toxie.

We tried to figure out a coiled chain, maybe twelve feet long, made of dark blue and green fabric. There was a wine cup engraved with laurel and people who looked like Romans. And a quiver filled with silver arrows. We even found a bellows. And a mallet made by using leather things to tie a heavy flat rock to an oversized handle. It didn't look like something you'd have wanted to be hit with, but it wasn't worth five bucks.

There were two objects covered by tarpaulins against the wall. One was a little bigger than Hatch; the other reached almost to the ceiling. He approached the smaller, pulled on the tarp, and it fell away. Toxie caught his breath. We were looking at a silver harp. The crown was engraved with a winged woman. Hatch took a deep breath, grinned, and tried it. Making any kind of unnecessary noise on the job was out of character for him, and, moreover, he couldn't carry a tune in a bucket. But it almost sounded good, and he lit up. Hatch rarely looked happy. This time, though, he was enjoying himself until he became aware that Toxie and I were staring at him. He stopped.

Toxie went back to the cases and found a water sprinkler that resembled a pine cone. I tried to lift a battered trident out of a long case. The trident was about fourteen feet long, and made of iron. It weighed a ton. I gave it up and moved to the next display: a golden war helmet that looked like the kind a Viking might have worn.

"Hey." Something funny had happened to Hatch's voice. He was in the process of uncovering the second object. "Take a look at this." He yanked the tarp away. No one had a light on at that time but there was just enough moon coming in the window to catch the glint of gold.

My first impression was that it was a yellow truck.

But when he turned his flashlight on it, I caught my breath. The thing was a chariot. Except that it wasn't because it was too big. The wheels were almost as high as Hatch's head, and the rim of the car was only inches below the ceiling. It was a statue. Had to be. It looked like gold, golden wheels and axles, golden shafts and rods, a golden platform for the driver that was protected by a blazing golden chassis.

Toxie hurried over and laughed and shook his head. "Not a chance," he said. But he took out a knife and gouged out a piece. After a moment he shook his head. "Gold all the way down, I think. It doesn't look like plate."

"It can't be," said Hatch, standing back and staring up. "Look at the size of this thing."

Toxie grinned and laid his cheek against the bright metal in a clear display of affection. "There must be a couple of tons of it," he whispered, awestruck. "But how the hell are we going to get it out of here?"

Hatch looked from the chariot to the elevator. No chance. Not in a thousand years.

"Even if we did get it downstairs," I said, "there's no door big enough."

"We're missing something," said Toxie. "How'd they get it in here?"

The double doors at the front end, the ones that connected with the staircase, were no larger than the elevator. Anyhow, it wouldn't be very practical to try to bring this thing up a flight of stairs. I looked at the ceiling.

"Bingo," said Hatch.

Two freight doors opened out onto the roof. "That's how they did it," he said. "They must have brought it in on a chopper."

"Hell of a big chopper," said Toxie.

"Why?" I said.

"Because that's the only way it would fit," said Hatch.

"No. I mean, why would you want a golden chariot up here?"

It was a good question. I glanced out the window. The sky was hard and clear, but washed out by the glare from Houston's lights.

"The guy must have been a collector," said Hatch.

A sixteen-wheeler crossed Eddy Street and started up the ramp onto the interstate.

I drew my attention back to the chariot and the harp. And the display cases. Wooden baskets and golden helmets and stone mallets and fabric chains. "What does he collect?"

While we were thinking about it, Toxie found still more gold. It was in the form of a long, thick shaft that looked like something you might fly a flag from. It was about sixteen feet long, and when he tried to remove it from its case, he poked one end into the display with the flute, and then almost brained Hatch. The top expanded into a small globe, supporting an eagle with outstretched wings.

"That won't fit in the elevator either." Hatch gestured toward me. "Cash, take it down the staircase." He produced a screw driver and a wrench, knelt down beside the chariot, and started trying to remove one of the wheels.

There were two cases left I hadn't looked in. One contained a gray metal staff with two gray metal snakes wrapped around it. The thing you always see in drug stores. The other held a pair of sandals and an odd-looking bronze hat shaped like a doughboy's helmet. The sandals and the hat were equipped with small wings. I'd seen them before.

The hat was round and broad rimmed. I looked it up later and found out it's called a *petasus*. It was popular with travelers and hunters in Greece at one time. The rod was a *caduceus*.

None of it looked as if it was worth anything, and I was about to move on when the windows lit up and we heard the not-too-distant roar of thunder. Odd: Only moments ago, it had been a clear night.

Toxie was still holding the golden shaft, and when his eyes met mine they were bright with an emotion I couldn't figure. "It feels funny," he said.

"What do you mean?"

As big as it was, he was balancing it pretty well, and it rested almost lightly in his grip. "Don't know," he said. But his eyes were glowing and I could see he was enjoying himself.

"Let's get it downstairs." I started toward the double doors when lightning threw the room into relief, and thunder shook the building. A sudden wind beat against the windows. Rain began to fall. That was when I realized there was a skylight.

Hatch was too busy to look up. He gave the hub a good crack with his wrench, and the wheel came off. The chariot banged down on its axle, and the wheel got away from him and crashed to the floor. He grinned, righted the wheel, and rolled it onto the elevator.

"Damn," laughed Toxie. "I feel like king of the world." He extended the staff toward the window.

The sky was full of lightning.

"Hey, Cash," he said, "try this."

I backed away. I'd never seen a storm come up that quickly before. The rain hammered against the skylight and the windows. A lightning bolt exploded over the roof and Toxie pulled the staff back and then held it out there again.

"I think you should put it down," I said.

He wasn't listening.

Hatch began to work on the other wheel.

Toxie held up a thumb, straight up, everything under control, and smiled like a man holding four aces. He rammed the staff through the glass and poked the storm.

The wind howled and the old threadbare curtains thrashed. Hatch looked up and shouted for him to stop. But Toxie offered the staff to

Continued on page 79



*But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.*

Yeats

IT WAS THE LAST EVENING OF THE OLD YEAR, BUT ALSO OF THE century. As the winter dusk fell like gray powder, a million lights appeared across the city, the rich glow of oil lamps and the fainter bluish glim of gas, the cold bold electric windows, and the electric pods that marched along the higher streets, the rouged neons of the cafés, the soft blush of candles. With such a massing of lit eyes, Paradis meant to watch nightlong, to make sure the ship of the city should sail through that terrifying gate, into her future.

On the boulevards there was, too, some frenetic hilarity already, crowds that surged and laughed and blew whistles, and a scatter of motorcars that rattled by with their own great lamps ahead, charged with shouting revelers. From the large

DOLL SKULLS

mansions about the Obelisk, an occasional premature firework escaped. Children ran through the avenues, half unaware of the momentum of the time, yet primed to it, calling and shrieking.

The cathedral on its hill was bright as a jewel box, its glorious windows like cut fruits on fire, signaling God for protection, perhaps.

Fear and festival were in the air.

The mother, as she trudged homeward, however, paid small attention to all this.

Ten years before she had been a young girl herself, and would have laughed and been whirled about in a fashionable frock, willing to drink wine, and to perch in the back of a polished car. But since then she had been in love, and been in abandonment, and next in pregnancy, and so in childbirth. As the moon changes, so did she. Her slender shining nights were gone. Now she was thin and worn, and in her hair something had clawed out the color in long strands. She was drab, weary; at twenty-seven years old.

As she walked up the long hill toward the clockmakers, she thought of her child. This child it was who had taken away her life, stopped her, the young girl, and gradually yet quickly altered her into this withered, partly stooping crone. Despite that, the mother — which was all she had become, there was no other name for her save drudge — loved the child very deeply, loved the child with all her soul. And the child, a girl of nine years, loved her mother in return with so much love that the whole city could not really hold it, and so it had escaped like the fireworks, up into the sky.

It was a fact that, when together, the mother and the child blossomed a little, were increased and better. But all else in their lives was difficult and unyielding. And, through that too, they were often apart for long hours, during which, lacking each other, they were also exposed to strangers who mistreated each of them in crass or subtle ways.

BY TANITH LEE

Illustrated by Mary O'Keefe Young

*Inside every cloud
there lurks a silver lining...
or is it the other
way around?*

AT THE END OF THE LINE AND BENT OVER, WITH LONG GRAY HAIR. BEFORE OUT OF IT, AS THE MOTHER DREW CLOSE,

The mother slaved underpaid in a shop, for instance, where her fellow workers were cruel and stupid, mocking not only their intollerant customers, their base employers, but also each other and all the world. They took delight in playing quite dangerous practical jokes, such as filling dusters with pepper, or making the winter roadway outside extra slippery with spilled liquid. They sneered at the elderly and courteous woman who came there to buy laces for her stays, overcharged her, and kept the money, saying she could afford it. They laughed openly at the flushed girl sent to purchase intimate underclothing. (Abashed, the mother had tried to be especially helpful to both of these victims.) Everything the assistants did, all told, was revolting, and the mother shunned them as best she could. Even so they stuck pins upside down into her tray of ribbons, put salt into her water glass, and called her to her face, the Imbecile.

The child, conversely, had been sent by law to school, and here her thinness and pallor, her lack of energy and her dim sight, had won her the reputation, too, of being a simpleton. Both larger and smaller children tormented her, called her foul names, and sometimes beat her — although not often, for the mere threat of violence elicited from her such utter terror, indeed to the point of vomiting, that it was enough for them. Her teachers regarded her with disgust, for she was not seen to be intelligent, and since she could not always make out what they wrote on their blackboards, or through fright, assimilate what they said, they either ignored her, or rapped her with a ruler on her thin white knuckles, and put her to stand in corners.

In such a nightmare, mother and child existed. For either of them there seemed no end, no rescue. At home, nevertheless, they did not speak of the agonies of that outside world, called by fools, real. They shut it from them with the strength of the embattled warriors they were.

Their home was a tenement which leaned. The stairs were partially rotten, the roof leaked, and sometimes a rat would arrive in their apartment. But the mother said they should not fear the rats, which were living things as they were. So she gave a little food to them, and each of the rats, three or four of them, became as docile and soft as a kitten, one tuskier especially, who would sit, pale as snow, on the mother's knee, and allow her to feed him crumbs of bread and cheese, or suck milk from her fingers.

Actually the child, so afraid, and with such cause, of human beings, had no fear of any other creature. She found beetles as fascinating as birds, and did not shy away from huge carriage horses on the street, only looking up at them in admiration. At school, one day, when the bullies hid a large spider in the child's hat, she coaxed it out on her palm and carried it to a window, where she let it go carefully into some ivy. This earned her their respect for a week. (Of course, had she been afraid of spiders, the shock might have sent her into hysterics.)

The mother earned little enough, and she and the child, the rats and beetles, ate very meagerly. Tonight, the mother had wished things to be different. It had come to her that she and her daughter were to see the turning over of one century into another, and that this was a remarkable occasion. The child, to whom the mother frequently told beautiful stories of a magic world that, fortunately, made the 'real world' truly appear a thing of sawdust and lies, became filled by her mother's excitement. And so they planned a small feast. To this end the mother had saved, and this evening, released early from her hell, she had gone about the shop and market eagerly. There was now in her basket fresh bread and a portion

of butter, some cheese, and cold meats, an onion, herbs and apples, milk and chocolate. This was satisfactory, but still all was not quite well. She had wanted to buy the child a gift. In vain, the mother had looked into the glass walls, like prisms of ice, the windows of the better shops. She had seen velvet dresses and sequined fans, and toys without number, brilliant and entrancing. And all of them as far beyond her means as the Milky Way.

At last she turned to go back, knowing she must not be too late, or the child would be frightened, aware too of the storybook cliché, she had become the poor slattern who cannot afford, for her bastard child, a starry present. And now a benign witch should step down from thin air, and offer her this present, because it was the hour for it, the moment, this sinister and sorceress night between two vast rifts of time. And the mother laughed a bitter tiny laugh. Her dreams were full of loveliness, and this she had imparted, unsullied, to her child, her poor, skinny, ugly little child that she loved so much. But though she might pass the wonder on, in her heart it had died. She had been *forced* to believe at last in reality.

Halfway up the hill, the mother paused. The sky was all dark now, and she saw the old clock tower in this darkness, lit too with a misty light in its crown. Nearby, at the gates of a little park, by the glimmer of lanterns, a few persons were selling things.

The mother went closer, unsure, not wanting to linger. There were pictures in cheap frames, not well-painted, and this made her quite sad, for either the artists had not troubled, or else they had no talent for this work, and had not yet found out their poor talent. Also there was various bric-a-brac, and some rickety chairs despoiled from some lost home. At the end of the line waited an old man, shabby and bent over, with long gray hair. Before him on the ground stood a box, and out of it, as the mother drew close, he produced two bright small objects. These he held out to her, and as he did so, his face lifted from the shadow. She had been about to flinch aside, but the look of him stayed her inadvertently. How handsome he was, he must in his youth have been a prince among men. Her heart actually fluttered because ten years before, she had been something of a gem herself.

"Dolls for you, madame. Two lovely ladies. For your children."

The mother looked down, and there they were, the dolls. Plainly they were sisters, and she saw at once one was a few years older than the other. Their sweet faces were pale, and shaped as the faces of two cats, and their great smoky eyes had been rimmed by gilt. From two gilt hats furled long milky plumes. Their dainty china hands were an iota larger than their perfect little feet encased in charcoal shoes with gilded heels. Around their throats were somber ruffs edged with glitter. The elder had dark curls and a dress of rose satin. The younger was blond, and clad in aquamarine silk. Beneath the skirts glimpsed some creamy layers of lace.

"Yes, madame. Now, how can you refuse? Think how your children will delight in them."

"Just my daughter, monsieur," said the mother, surprising herself. She did not often now confide in anyone.

"Ah, just your daughter," repeated the old man. One of his eyes had a drooping lid, a sort of wink. It seemed to say: *I knew all along but we must pretend, mustn't we?*

"She would love them," said the mother.

"Then surely she should have them. The world teaches that denial is good, but this is one of the great lies. *Fulfillment* is good, providing no one is harmed. And the truly happy do no harm."

WAITED AN OLD MAN, SHABBY HIM ON THE GROUND STOOD A BOX, AND HE PRODUCED TWO BRIGHT SMALL OBJECTS.

The mother's eyes burnt as if they had filled with tears, but they had not. She said, tentatively, "How much is it you're asking?"

The old man spoke a price. It was quite cheap.

The mother thought she could go without stockings for another month. What did stockings matter?

"Then I could afford one of them."

"Ah now, madame. Could you be so heartless as to part them? They're sisters, as you can see."

"I can only afford one doll," said the mother, firming herself, as she forever had to.

The old man said, "Well, tomorrow is another century, or perhaps we shall be swallowed by a star, as some have predicted. So, I'll give you both my dolls for the price of one. My box is empty. These are the last. Tomorrow I go far away. Two for one."

"Are you certain?" said the mother.

The old man looked at her again. His winking eye said, *Come now, you know I don't say what I don't mean. Don't you remember, three hundred years ago, when you and I, both of us young and fair, danced on a floor like ice, with champagne in our blood and wings on our feet?*

The mother blushed faintly. She fumbled for her purse, and found the money and handed it to him. He bowed to her as a count would do to a princess. Then he put the two dolls gently down into her basket, lying them between the bread and chocolate, between the staff of life and the sweet unneeded comfort that life makes so necessary.

As he did this, she beheld an odd ring on his hand. It was set with a miniature skull, carved presumably from bone. Sallow and ominous. She did not care for it and wondered if this meant some bad thing, and she should beware. Her embarrassment altered into slight fearfulness, and she thanked him and quickly turned away.

She was almost apprehensive as she went on, that he would now call loudly after her, demanding more money, perhaps with a harsh and sneering laugh. He did not. And as she turned upward into the leaning canted rows of ancient houses, slums now, mostly all darkened after the carnival of lights below, she saw the stars visible overhead. She pulled her skimpy scarf from her neck to cover the dolls, lest some thief notice their finery. She had the urge, as she did so, to explain to them what she did. But she had learned not to talk to inanimate objects.

WHEN SHE REACHED HOME, SHE found the child anxiously waiting in the larger of their two rooms, but the anxiety was, this time, more of impatience than unease, because the child too had been busy.

She had washed and dressed herself in her best frock, and undone her long

rat's tails of hair, and combed them. Then she had laid the table with the embroidered cloth kept for birthdays, and put out the cutlery and the plates and cups. Obviously, too, the child had been setting aside some of her slight allowance of money, which was meant to gain her a glass of milk and a piece of bread during the school day, or a fruitcake on her days of holiday. In the middle of the table, stuck to an azure saucer, was a tall vanilla candle marked with the hours from eight until midnight. And by it, some primroses gleamed in a bottle.

All the shabby furniture had been dusted and the cushions plumped up and a painted shawl spread on the best chair. Their two pictures, one of which showed knights riding beneath a balcony of graceful women, and the other one, a lion asleep, had been decorated by paper bows. Best of all perhaps, in the narrow window hung a string of paper birds, superbly cut out and colored by the child herself, in secret, with sequins winking on their wings.

"Oh," said the mother.

"Do you like it? Do you?" asked the child. Her mother was the only one in the world to whom she ever dared to offer anything of herself.

"Oh yes — oh yes. It's so pretty — it's so exactly right. And the candle! And the wonderful birds. But you didn't have your milk —"

"Yes," said the child, "every other day."

They regarded each other solemnly. Man has never lived by bread alone, and these two both knew it very well. The mother conceded the child's common sense, and better yet, her uncrushed imagination, her ability to ascend.

Then the child darted to her and they embraced. It had been a terrible blow to them both that, due to the dangerous nature of the house stairs, the child was no longer able to fly down them and meet her mother at the lower door.

"I have a surprise for you," said the mother presently, "but I want to take it into the bedroom and wrap it up for you. You must have it at midnight. And after dinner you should have an hour's sleep, so you're awake when the century crosses over."

"Oh no," said the child. "I won't need to sleep before. There's no school in the morning. You promised not."

"So I did. No, no horrid school. No horrible shop. We'll stay up until one in the morning, and then we'll sleep until ten."

They gave a mutual cry of happiness and victory. For a moment the foulness of Reality fell down and was trampled underfoot by two pairs of slender feet, both in ill-fitting shoes.

As the mother wrapped the two dolls carefully in silvery paper, in the cramped, damp-darkened bedroom, she heard the child bustling about, washing the salad of herbs in a basin, cutting up the onion and apple and heating the oil in the pan.

The dolls were so beautiful, and so pleasant to touch, to eye and fingers like lakoum to the mouth, honeyed, soothing, voluptuous, nearly drugged. The child would love them utterly, for she loved beautiful things. The mother acknowledged, with vague shame, that her child thought she too, the mother, very beautiful. But the mother knew that she was not, and knew that the child was not, except to her mother.

However, when the apple and onion were fried, and put with meat and cheese, and the bread and butter set out, and the hour candle duly lit, and the cranky gas lowered, they sat there in a sort of glow, eyes luminous and cheeks warm, laughing and telling silly stories that made them shake with mirth. And when the hot chocolate was prepared for dessert, and the mother added a dash of brandy, they became quite drunk and began to talk to each other of kings and enchantresses, as if they knew them well, which in a way they did.

(Only once or twice, did the mother think of the curious skull ring the old man had worn. She had been taught fairly remorselessly that nothing good could ultimately come of anything, even of joy. With great skill she still tried to push this lesson from her. The old man did not matter at all. Only the present of the two beautiful dolls.)

THAT EVENING SHE RETURNED SOME FRUIT AND CHOCOLATE...BOUGHT IN A FIT THE DEATH OF EVERYTHING, ALTHOUGH THE

They found it really quite easy to keep awake, although both had had to rise about six that morning. It was after all a night that arrived only once in a hundred years. They sang, and danced even, pecking round on the worn carpet to three hummed waltz tunes. When a wind blew up over the city, as if responding to the speed with which now — it was after eleven — Paradis rushed toward the future, the paper birds flew about on their strings. And the mother realized that perhaps her child could have been clever, if she had been given some chance. And it seemed to her that possibly she could save to have the child's eyes looked at, and glasses prescribed, and, even if this should mean more cruelty and invective for the child to endure, it might also permit her to learn more. And the mother would not remember just then that the teachers in the poor school were ignorant and useless, at best stupid and at worst monsters, and glasses might not help at all since there was not much of worth to be seen with them.

By five minutes to midnight, when they had made a second chocolate with a second wisp of brandy, the mother was childishly dreaming that there was a way to be found through the labyrinth of terrors. It was the food and the chocolate, the brandy and the flying birds. But she did not remind herself of that.

Tonight they were a queen and a princess. They could feast and stay up late, and tomorrow sleep on, regardless of the dictates of the world.

"Mama — it's true. The bells are ringing!"

They went to the window hand in hand, and looked out into the clustered dark which was, one moment dense and impenetrable, and next — alive, alight, blazing like a sudden morning. From somewhere a thousand extra light were born, actually from the very meanest windows, where in a sudden unreasoning festival of amazement, the despairing doomed and damned had all at once thrown off the darkness and reached out to the promise of hope. And in the sky a thousand other lights were breaking, pink stars and gilded, hail of tinsel, fireworks like flakes of the moon. The clocks struck and the bells clamored, and up from the city rose all the pent screams of arrival and astonished greeting, as if every citizen was only in that instant born.

The threshold had been passed. The sky had not fallen and the earth still bore everything up. The moment had come — and was gone.

"Isn't it wonderful?" said the child.

"Yes," said the mother. "Yes."

And they opened the window to hear the noises better, the car horns and the whistles and trumpets, the dogs barking in front, the smashing of glasses for good luck.

"And now," said the mother. She put the silvery package into the palms of her child. The child parted the paper carefully.

The mother stood as if high up or far away, watching her child. She saw a shadow spread over the face of the child. The child stood speechless. She was too old for dolls. The mother had misjudged. How could she have been so foolish as to buy them? They were shoddy, this was the reason for their inexpensiveness. An awful mistake.

The child said, stiffly, "They're more lovely than anything." She looked up at her mother. The child's face had changed with the passing of the century. What was it? "Their names," said the child, "are Miralda and Dianelle."

"Do you like them?"

"Yes," said the child.

Abruptly the mother saw what had happened. It was not disappointment. One of the great shocks of existence had occurred. The child was in love.

The mother went to her, and gently, almost timorously, touched her hair. The mother did not touch the dolls any more. They had become attached to the child, as if by strings of metal, and gone with the child away, into a cube of crystal.



ONE OF THE REASONS FOR FESTIVALS IS the belief that through them, something may change for the better, that by toasting a new year, it may bring different and kinder fortune, that a corner has been turned, a door gone through. Most humans hold to this dream stubbornly, and when it is finally, utterly lost, they grow old.

The mother credited herself with having grown up. Yet, the festival had galvanized her, and when a couple of days later she found herself back in her awful place of work, with everything gray and abysmal about her still, some inner child in her that was herself, raged and wept. This is the price that hope extracts. Hope is one of the best gifts, but also one of the harshest masters.

Because she had returned a day late, on pretense of illness, her colleagues had a story that the Imbecile had been sick with drink. She had been seen, they jeered, soliciting sailors on the antique quay of the Angel, only the basest of whom would go with her because she was so unappealing.

The mother bore this because she had to. But as the days and weeks went by, and nothing improved, chalk was rubbed into her threadbare coat, and coins stolen from her purse, she found herself struggling with her own pain. This was much harder, for by now something had truly been changed, and for the worse.

There had always existed solace for the mother in her child. At this stage, without the child, the mother would probably have sunk much lower, even under the river, maybe. And the child too had needed the mother. Now however, the child was otherwise absorbed.

At first, the mother was captivated, on coming in, to find the child there playing with the two dolls, Miralda and Dianelle. This play involved the table, and the piling up of some books, or the placing of the fern from under the window, a lamp, cards, perhaps two thimbles of water, the painted shawl. The child greeted her mother affectionately, and did everything she was asked, even cleared the table instantly. But when they sat to their supper of bread and coffee or thin soup, the dolls sat with them.

By the lamp's low light, their smoky eyes gleamed, their curls, dark and blond, glistened and their finery shone.

The child did not speak very much, unless questioned about the dolls.

Then they had all three been walking in the park, by the great fountains, and here Miralda, the elder of the dolls, had spoken to a handsome duke, who much admired her, but Dianelle had been more interested in sporting with her little dog. Or they had been to a theater, where half the audience rose to glimpse them, and seen there a wonderful performance in five acts, and in the intervals they

TO THE TENEMENT, WITH OF RECKLESSNESS, FEELING HER DEATH, SPRING NIGHT WAS FRESH AND STARRED BY BUDS.

had eaten sugar almonds and marzipan, and drunk transparent wine. Sometimes they had stayed home, however, in their mansion, where marble statues held torches, and there was a domed conservatory up three hundred steps, from which it was possible to observe, through a telescope, the planets of other galaxies.

The mother listened, in delight herself, to the child's inventions. In the past, it had been she, the mother, who had told the stories. And for a while the twenty-seven-year-old woman, bent and elderly, and worn out as a glove, had been lifted from herself and floated there, her eyes fixed without focus on flighty Danielle and wise Miralda, partaking of their freedoms, decorum, education, and opulence. Through a sort of shimmering haze she saw them, like candlelight. She almost fancied that their heads would graciously turn upon their white necks in the somber ruffs, or that, when the children lifted them to show them dance, they did so.

But in the end, the child grew more reticent. She would say now only that all was well, that tonight Miralda and Danielle were to take her to another country. This, when pressed, she would explain to be a very cold one, with mountains diademed by ice, or a very hot one where enormous beasts prowled and parrots laughed in the cinnamon trees. Or there would be cities with minarets. Or a sea where temples came down into the waves.

"In your dreams," said the mother, at last.

"If you like," said the child.

And this cool little phrase turned the mother aside, as if now she had spoken in the wrong language, the language of a stranger.

Sometimes the mother would wake too, in the big bed, and see, as if miles away, the child quietly sleeping. Previously the child had been inclined to snore in her sleep from winter congestion, but now she was so still that, once or twice, with a pang of fear, the mother bent over her to see that she breathed. And on the pillow sat the dolls, Miralda, Danielle, like two little fairies or angels set to act sentinel. How hard their eyes in the packed darkness, hard as tears that had become granite. The mother remembered that, unlike other dolls, they did not smile, and she recalled they had no color in their cheeks.

Somewhere away within her own skull, the child was dancing, boating, riding in bright carriages or on the backs of dove-skin horses. Miralda was introducing her to painters, poets, and musicians. Danielle was guiding her through picnics of frosted sweetmeats and champagne. How old was the child in these dreams? Perhaps the timeless age of a doll, between maiden and baby.

"And what did you eat?" the mother asked of the good dinner, where every goblet and plate had been of sheerest glass. The child told her of dishes from the *Arabian Nights*.

"And what dress did you wear?"

"Oh, it was silk. And I had pearls in my hair, and feathers."

The mother knew that in her dreams, and in her playing when awake with Miralda and Danielle, the child was not without beauty—or, now, accomplishments, for one evening she had entered the apartment to find the child singing in a hoarse thin voice some song, she said—when asked—she had composed to her imaginary guitar.

This waking and sleeping dream-world, then, initially appealing to the mother, began to unnerve her as it closed her outside.

There is always this problem, just as the real world is so often determinedly confused with the Real, so it is difficult to differentiate between others that are fantasy, or maybe madness.

Christ Himself seemed to have found this an obstacle with some of his listeners.

The mother began to brood upon what went on now with her child and the two dolls, bought so easily, on the Night of Passage.

Surely the child's complete immersion in their invented life could not be healthy, might indeed be a danger—but then what was there to offer in return?

She became lonely, too, the mother. Her child was considerate to her, the way a loving daughter would be, as she went into the distance, with new inspiring others.

There was no one to seek out for advice. For ten years or more, the mother had had adult conversation only with horrors, and what humanity sometimes calls beasts, forgetting beasts do not merit such connections.

Sometimes she tried to tempt the child to different things. A book of pictures bought at some cost, an outing. But the books were received with gratitude, and carried off to furnish more fuel for the adventures of Miralda and Danielle. The outing could not compete with them. And the mother noted as well, a *politeness* in the child, a *patience*—not to hurt the kind parent who meant so well and could provide—so very little. Only now and then, some element would attract the child. And she would say, "Oh, Miralda's swans are like that one!" Or, "Danielle came down in a ball gown just the color of the sky."

One night, as the mother walked home, about two months after the start of the new century, like many other nights, she found she had begun to cry. And she leaned on a wall, out of sight, lost as a girl of nine whose mother has left her.

THE MONTHS WENT BY. SPRING FLUTTERED DOWN INTO PARADIS, THE new moon of seasons. The mother did her accounts carefully, for now the time was coming when the expense of the winter stove would be balanced by the summer turning of milk, and the sometimes undrinkable quality of the common tap water.

At the shop, the assistants found a new game, remarking that *something* had begun to smell. It was of course untrue, unless they scented the stench of their own souls. The mother bore with it, as ever. But she sensed now, abruptly, a day was drawing near when they would manage to oust her, and what then would she do? Perhaps she might find work in the poisonous laundries, but these would probably kill her in a year, she was no longer physically strong.

That evening she returned to the tenement, with some fruit and chocolate that was bought in a fit of recklessness, feeling her death, the death of everything, although the spring night was fresh and starred by buds.

When she opened the apartment door, fear leapt at her throat.

There at the table sat the child, still as stone, and down her face the tears were streaming, pouring, like rain.

"What is it?" cried the mother. And she ran forward, and grasped the child, as if to get between her and whatever novel dreadful force was now at work.

"No, Mama, I'm safe. I am. No, nothing happened to me." The child held the mother as protectively as the mother held the child. This the mother became aware of, and reassured somewhat, loosened her grip.

"What, then?"

The child indicated the table. The mother now saw it—she had

THE SONG SHE SANG THE YET IT ENTRANCED HER, AS IF IT HAD HAD BEEN IN HER DREAMS, SOME MARVELOUS

seen nothing in the room but the child until that moment.

There, on the softest cushion, lay the elder doll, Miralda. She was stretched on her back with her arms at her sides. Her curls and the plumes of her hat framed her pale exquisite face. Beside her had been positioned the other doll, Diannele, sitting stoically upright. The hard clear eyes of both of them reflected the lamp, but in a glassy, sightless way, like the eyes of a dead fish.

"Miralda died," said the child softly.

"But —" said the mother. She checked herself at once. "How terrible."

"She was very old," said the child, still weeping, but without any expression, and the mother noticed oddly that her nose did not run — she wept herself like a weeping doll. "Older than she seemed. Much, much."

"Yes," said the mother humbly. "And poor Diannele must be so sad."

"Diannele is dying too. She told me, when I found Miralda. Only a few hours."

"But can't she be saved?" said the mother, unaccountably, perhaps anxious now. "They're great ladies, Miralda, Diannele. Some important physician —"

"There's no cure. They're so old. They've done such a lot," said the child.

The mother shuddered. She wondered, caught herself wondering, if Diannele would require a priest. And, horribly, unavoidably, if she herself would want one, at her own deathbed.

As if the child knew what she thought, or some of it, she said, "There's no need for any fuss. They're not frightened. Diannele told me, only the body dies. And she wants to be with Miralda. She always has been."

SUDDENLY THE MOTHER GLIMPSED — ABSURD, fearsome — what it was that alarmed her. The child, contained in this world of dream and fantasy, had become one with the two dolls. If they died — what did she expect for herself? Before she could resist the impulse, the mother touched the forehead of her child, to test for fever.

"No, no, Mama," the child said again, very gently. "I'm quite well."

The mother got up. She stood there, and did not know what to do. At length, she made the chocolate, and put the cup beside her daughter's hand. The child's tears had ceased.

"Drink what you can."

The child nodded, tasted the cup, and set it down.

The mother withdrew to the bedroom, and here she took out some stockings that needed to be darned. As she did this, she began to pray. She reckoned herself peculiar, foolish, an imbecile for sure, for, although she did not now believe in God, or thought Him wicked, she would always pray to Him in her direst moments. It seemed to her there had never been any answer, except perhaps further punishment. And yet, to speak to Him eased her. Of course, there was no one else to whom she could turn.

After about two hours, she stole out, and saw that the child was sitting as before, with the cold chocolate congealing beside her. Both dolls now lay on the cushion. Mysteriously, aptly, the lamp was

burning low. It was a room of shadows and mourning.

"Oh —" said the mother.

"It's over now," said the child, almost the words of the Cross. The mother clasped her hands together. "But we must bury them," said the child.

The mother cast about her mind wildly. She must not upset the child further. But what was to be done? And in the center of her confusion a voice rose in her, which said, *What nonsense. Throw the things out with the rubbish. Or better still, sell them in the market.* This voice, which had the exact tones of her colleagues' in the hell-shop, she recognized immediately and pushed from her with enormous invisible violence. And it seemed to her she saw the voice falling miles down, back into some pit.

"There's a paper box," said the mother. "Do you remember — I brought it from the shop to keep gloves in. It is only paper, but if they're wrapped in the painted shawl — will that do?" Her own voice was full of apology and pleading.

The child said, "Oh, yes."

"And tomorrow we can go to some place where there's — some open space. And I can put the box into the earth."

The child looked up now. She smiled at her mother. "We can keep the box," she said. "It will be all right. You see, really the funeral will have carriages made of glass and dark horses with plumes, and hundreds of people will walk behind. And there will be a mass, with two thousand candles."

"Yes," said the mother.

But then she fetched the box, and put into it the painted shawl, that was the only thing which remained of the colored, lighted days, ten years before. The child lifted the dolls into this cocoon, and quickly covered their faces. Then the lid was put down.

They lowered the box into the deepest drawer of their chest, where it need not be disturbed.

And then they stood there, in the gloom of the bedroom as mourners do, at a loss, once the coffin has gone down into its hole.

Later, when they had eaten their bread and cheese, and were in bed, the mother lay awake. She was not afraid, but full of an ominous sadness, a sickening uncertainty. Beside her the child slept, silently as now she always did.

Finally the dawn remade the sky, and the noises of the day commenced in the street below. The child woke, and said softly, "Mama, may I have a book — a book with words to read?"

"Yes, my love. But you know how trying it is for your poor eyes — we'll go to see a doctor soon."

"My eyes are much better, Mama. I can even see the things on the blackboard at school."

The mother did not believe this, but she did not say so. She promised the book. She had partly noticed the child's knuckles were not so often split open and bruised by rulers, but she had put this down to a random upsurge of mislaid humanity in the teachers.

While they drank their coffee, she watched the child surreptitiously. The child seemed calm, no longer distressed or tearful.

She has forgotten it, the mother thought, hopefully. And she has grown out of the dolls. That's good. It must be good.

THE END CAME VERY SIMPLY.

By then it was summer, hot and steamy in the lower city as if Paradise lay in the heart of a primordial swamp, as once it had.

MOTHER DID NOT KNOW, AND COME FROM SOME PLACE WHERE SHE COUNTRY FORGOTTEN THROUGH AMNESIA...

Entering the shop, at the usual early hour, the mother met one of the assistants skipping toward her, while the others waited, leering and sneering.

"Monsieur wants to see you."

It has come. Oh God, what shall I do?

But in the wooden bravery of despair, the mother went without delay to a dingy room, where the overseer of hell awaited her, his congested face swollen further with displeasure.

"You are to go and see someone. You're to go now. I don't like it. I won't be told what's what in this way."

The mother poised before him, astonished.

He thrust at her a letter, and she read it, but it made no sense.

"Go on, go on," cried Monsieur, flapping her off.

Outside, the colleagues clustered. "Got shot of you, has he, Imbecile? Oh what a shame!"

The mother did not speak. She sat down on a chair, while they capered around her.

"Want some brandy, do you? You'll be lucky. You can have some of my snot if you like!" And at this witticism they were so convulsed they barely saw her pass out of the door, which perhaps peeved them later, for they were never to see her do it again, or pass in, for that matter.

At a small office on another street, the mother was treated more humanly, if with equal patronage. These, too, supposed her slow or retarded. At least the facts were persuaded into her.

Then she walked away, up through the city, wandering, not knowing where she was, and as this went on she seemed to catch sight momentarily of bizarre things, a bird that flew about with wings of softest fire, an arching rainbow, pink and honey, that described the towers of the cathedral, a boat on the river with dragonfly sails, a car driven by a bear.

Finally she went into a café and ordered aniseed liqueur that she had not tasted in ten years. And this she drank, startled at herself. And when she burst into laughter, the waiters thought her tipsy, but only smiled, because she was a good-looking woman, worth a glance or two, and why should such an interesting woman not drink a liqueur at nine in the morning?

After the liqueur, the mother knew where she must go and there she went, to the tumbling swarthy house that held her daughter's school.

The children had just been let out for some recreation, which entailed sitting in a shadeless yard with three stone walls to look at and, over one of those, the unswayed street. A single child, however, was seated on a bench, and another girl was holding up over this child's head a dilapidated sunshade. Like a little queen she sat there, the favored one, and others sat at her feet, two cutting up an apple and a pear for her, and another begging for something, this was quite evident from her gestures. Then all the girls begged too. Suddenly the seated child began to sing. She had a sweet high voice, a voice like that of a well-tuned instrument. The song she sang the mother did not know, and yet it entranced her, as if it had come from some place where she had been in dreams, some marvelous country forgotten through amnesia, and now glimpsed once again with a pang of memory, nostalgia, and wild excitement.

The other children were also affected by this singing. They drew in close, craning, their eyes fixed on the child who had the bench. Even the rough boys, who played on, tussling, ceased to make any noise. Had they been older, they would have listened frankly.

When the song was over, there was a space of silence, and then the mother, half-embarrassed, raised her own voice and called to her child.

The girl on the bench got up instantly, and came running over to her.

But as she came, the mother saw it all, all that she had not seen. How the child's hair was full and shining, her skin like porcelain, the soft flush at her cheeks, the deep shade of her eyes. And in those few seconds, like an hour of careful thought, the mother beheld not only how her child was changed, but saw through her, as if through clearest water, to what she would become. She saw her lifted up upon some spire of celebrity, and dancing in the sky, with pale emeralds on her fingers, and Paradis at her feet; the world at her feet.

"I've something to tell you. It's wonderful."

"Yes," said the child. She was not surprised, only ready. She expected the best news.

"An elderly lady used to come into the shop. She was so courteous, old-fashioned. The others were so rude to her. Poor creature, she died. But oh — she's left me some money. A lot of money."

"Oh, yes," said the child, happy, not surprised.

"She didn't know me, you see. She said — that I was kind to her."

As they looked at each other, the woman and her daughter, they were not privy to what else the elderly lady had bequeathed. The pretty little bow-tied presents soon to be delivered to all the remaining assistants in the shop. Which each contained the turds of dogs and other, even more prolific, animals.

They did not know, or need to know, the woman and her daughter. They were already quite busy talking of the small house they would inhabit, with milk-washed walls and polished floors, with mirrors having pictures of butterflies in their corners, and the knights and ladies, and the lion, in areas of honor above a piano, overlooking the walled garden with tea-roses. Nor had they forgotten the three or four rats, the white one particularly, and planned how they might be induced to move with them from the tenement.

As the mother and her child went away from that school, the pupils grouped by the wall, looking out like convicts, watching two freed prisoners escape. They had only the apple left to them, the convicts, and the pear. Which they ate, and so had no more.

LOVE CAN TAKE MANY FORMS. EVEN THAT OF A PERFECT AND BEAUTIFUL man, abused and whipped, bleeding and asphyxiating on a cross. Love is bewildering.

In the night the young woman woke and got out of bed, leaving her daughter sleeping. She went by stealth to the chest and from it she took the coffin, the paper box, and carried it, closing the bedroom door behind her, into the outer room.

Here she lit the gas, and taking one breath, drew off the box's lid, and delicately pulled away the folds of her shawl.

Not much was left of Miralda and Dianelle. Some threads of their glamorous dresses, aquamarine, rosy, some sprinkles of gilt, their dainty shoes. And there was some sawdust, such as might be used to fill the interior parts of dolls. Other than this, there were only two tiny skulls, about the size of acorns, well-shaped, complete in every way, even to the minuscule teeth, which were charmingly clean and wholesome, like seed-pearls, though otherwise the bone had darkened. ♦

PLAYING WITH A FULL DECK

There is fine artistry in game and collector cards.

BY JANE FRANK



ABOVE: Ed Beerd's Cryos of Meridon from the collectors' card set *Flights of Fantasy*, produced by Destini Productions, Inc. NEAR RIGHT: Thomas Martinez painted Tempest Neferu representing Anubis, the Egyptian guide for the dead, for the upcoming expansion of *Black Dragon's Tempest of the Gods*. OPPOSITE: Tom Kidd's Justice painted for *Last Unicorn*.

ONCE UPON A TIME, THERE WERE JUST BASEBALL CARDS, and maybe a few football cards, and a market dominated by Topps. The gum was unchewable, the photos were boring, and the only attraction was 'the player.' Today, ice hockey, basketball, soccer, and other sports are definitely part of an estimated \$800 million sports card market, and the cards are *anything* but dull. But who cares? Now, thanks to our even bigger appetite for 'non-sports' cards, the excitement of flipping, collecting, trading, and controlling stacks of laminated, foil-stamped, die-cut, chromium-skinned, embossed, hologrammed, and even UV-protected images printed on thick, high-quality paper card stock, can be enjoyed by fans who've never had the slightest interest in Mickey Mantle.

For companies like Wizards of the Coast, White Wolf, Friedlander Publishing (FPG), Comic Images, TSR, Paramount, Comic Images, and Mayfair Games, to name just a few, there's an even bigger \$100 million non-sports market at stake, and they've got the stuff to do it. Games like *Magic: The Gathering* (Wizards of the Coast), *Rage* (White Wolf), and *Illuminati* (Steve Jackson Games) are consistently top-sellers, forcing comic







TOP: Greek expansion of Towers in Time card game from Thunder Castle Games. Art by David Trowbridge. ABOVE: Peter Pracownik painted Card No. 61, Battle Action — Fire Breathing, from the game Wyvern: The Game of Dragons, Dragon Slayers, and Treasure produced by U.S. Games. RIGHT: Orc-Warriors is a creature card face by Brian Snoddy for the game Middle-Earth: The Wizards from Ice. OPPOSITE: Brom painted Raguel for Last Unicorn.

stores to open 'game rooms.' And they're turning older fantasy role-playing gamers into an audience every bit as turned on by metallic wrappers and inks, hot and hotter colors, mylar and premium sizes, and valuable 'singles' as they are enthusiastic about fantasy gaming, art, and the images that come straight out of fantasy role-playing games, comics, and everyone's favorite science fiction story.

A record 30,000 gaming fans attended this year's GenCon, the biggest gaming convention in the country, and compared to the 50,000 attendees at the 16th National Sports Convention, that may not seem like much. But card players and collectors can tell you this: designer 'Super-premium' Stadium Club sports cards, with their promise of 'extreme' cards randomly inserted into packs, and true-to-life 'action shots,' tailor-made to appeal to an MTV-generation, pale in imaginativeness when placed next to equivalent non-sport subject matter and themes.

For sheer breadth of subject matter, if not depth, there's nothing in the world of trading cards to match the incredible

variety and quality of art seen in science fiction and fantasy card collections and trading card games. They are also lots of fun.

Keith Parkinson, one of a handful of talented artists-turned-games-creators, knows about fantasy art and also about 'fun.' He's one of a few artists whose names have long been practically synonymous with fantasy role-playing games (RPGs) in the days before cards (BC), who are now applying their imaginations and artistic talents to the development of trading card games — among other ventures. *Guardians*, a game he licensed to FPG has been described as "a neat little game, with good art." Parkinson would certainly agree.

With artists like Achilles, Beauvais, Brom, Maitz, Ploog, Rowena, and Warhol on the team, how could the art not be good? Parkinson claims *Guardians* is a strategic card game that "sets a playing field that plays better and looks better" than the alternatives, and one that will appeal to a greater range of players than strictly role-playing games, which offer a freedom to players that can prove daunting.

Jonathan Tweet, affable game designer of *Everway*, the Wizards of the Coast's newest entry into the RPG market (see Games column this issue), says his game "is specifically designed to be accessible to people who have never played RPGs before," and that includes people who have fixed (and wrongful) assumptions about RPGs, as well as those eighteen to thirty-five year-olds who are ready to tackle a game that has the flexibility of RPGs, but uses supporting tools like cards, to drive the action, characters, and story.

Tweet started his quest for a better game at the age of thirteen, when he — like many other fans — became involved with *Dungeons & Dragons*, which set the benchmark for not only the look, but the continued expansion of RPGs. Now, those former play-



ers are not only turning to card games which have clear 'winners and losers' like *Star Quest* (Comic Images) or links to mass media vehicles, like *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, but who also want more than just a game, and the collectibility of cards is helping to fuel that desire. Expansion decks, collectible cards, chase cards, and entire product lines of source books, price guides, and story anthologies built around the characters in the games are being sold.

Not surprisingly, many of the artists who have contributed to the huge success of the science fiction and fantasy literary genre and superhero comics, long known for their brilliantly colorful illustrations, have also turned their skills to the seemingly insatiable market for collectible cards, which depends on much the same vibrant and highly imaginative images as role-playing card games and trading card games. For, beyond the huge share of the non-sports market commanded by games publishers, there exists opportunities for publishing cards that are nothing but celebrations of the artists, and the artistry, that has made fantasy and science fiction gaming, comics, book covers, movie posters, and record albums the incredibly imaginative, brilliantly executed creations they are.

Dozens of science fiction, fantasy, and horror illustrators — surely all the professional artists who have established their names in these genres — have been accorded the singular honor of having what amounts to a retrospective of their artistic career commemorated in at least one ninety-card deck of plastic-coated paper cards. And that's not counting their special hologram sets (usually three in a set), the gold or silver hologram sets (another three different cards), the 'chase' sets, the autographed cards, the spectra cards, the advance promo cards, the foil sets, the tekchrome sets, the mylar prism sets — all of which insert cards are especially collectible, as are the artists' uncut sheets (the laminated sheets before separation by the printer into ninety cards).

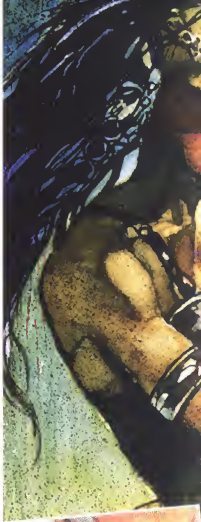
Each one of these collections is a veritable mini-gallery of art, compressing into one small package the best of what an artist has produced. One collector I know refers to them as "paintings in your pocket," and she's not far from wrong. Frazetta, Boris, Rowena, Whelan — the names every fantasy art lover knows — are but one slice of this run-away collector card market. Even the art of James Gurney, mightily successful creator of the children's (and adult's!) illustrated book *Dinotopia* has been captured in a card set (by Collect-A-Card).

The colors and reproduction values on these cards are tremendous. Comic Images and FPG are the two top companies in the field. Together, they dominate the art card market, with high quality full color images of original paintings reproduced in miniature on the front of heavyweight UV coated high gloss paper, and additional artwork, sketches or unpub-





ABOVE: Den Beaucias' card for Fantasy Adventures from Mayfair Games shows "Fifty feet of scales and teeth, and that was only the neck." TOP RIGHT: White Wolf's Rage collectible trading card game includes Richard Kane Ferguson's card from the Wyrms expansion set. RIGHT: Pyramid Lizards by Ian Miller will probably be in an expansion deck for Everway from Wizards of the Coast.



lished art, and narratives (usually written by the artist), also in full color, on the back. Conan, Tarzan, Heavy Metal Magazine art, swords and sorcery, Warren Publications' covers for Creepy and Eerie magazines, horror, spaceships, and much more ... all the art you ever loved, produced by the best fantasy illustrators in the world, can literally be at your fingertips.

You can buy them by the pack, (ten cards per pack) and take your time in assembling a complete deck, or by the box (thirty-six packs per box), and increase your odds to three or four complete decks, plus extras for trading. If you're lazy, like me, you can buy them by the set, already sorted, for about \$10 to \$30, depending on the artist and how many cases of cards (usually twelve to sixteen boxes per case) were produced. And if you're very lucky, you'll find a special metallic or autographed



card, sprinkled randomly through the packs about 1:1000 cards, or even win a special piece of original art by the artist by finding an instant-winner card—or winning a drawing.

The craze for rare and/or special bonus cards that have promoted speculation in the gaming card industry spawned magazines devoted to the pricing and advertising of the cards and has driven up the price for rare ones, twos, and threes (as singles are ranked by rarity) has seemingly spared art card collectors. So far, science fiction and fantasy fans who are crazy for the art that has been used to illustrate their favorite literary char-

acters and magazines have been able to go equally crazy over the cards, without fear of having to take out a second mortgage to pay for gaps in their collections. And several artists are well into their second (and even third and fourth) published collections. . . with no end in sight!

Where is the future in card gaming and art card collections? If you ask artists, they'll tell you they've never had so much fun as when they're painting these little things, each averaging from 4 by 6 inches to 8 by 10 inches. Freedom to work for organizations that are less rigid than large book publishing com-

glomerates, and "open to new ideas," as Ian Miller describes his experience with Wizards of the Coast and other entrepreneurial companies, which tie contracts to royalties based on the rise or fall of their games, are a refreshing change for artists who have largely spent their working careers selling book rights on a one-time fee basis. And if you ask collectors, they'll be too busy stuffing the cards into their nine-pocket plastic albums to answer.

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To dice or not to dice: *Everway* and *Dragon Dice* come up with completely different answers.

I'M NOT GOING TO KID YOU, THIS IS A GOOD JOB. PEOPLE SEND ME GAMES. I PLAY THE GAMES. Someone pays me for writing about the games. What could be better?

This is not really a game review column, at least not as that term is used elsewhere. When the games are great, you see them in here. When the games are not fit to wipe your feet on, you don't see them here. I don't give bad reviews.

The reason is not that I don't want to offend the advertisers (well, all right, the reason is not *only* so I don't offend the advertisers), it's because this is one small column in a magazine that covers the whole gamut of fantasy. If you want to see every game that hit the shelves this month, then a games magazine is the place to look. The idea in this column is to highlight those games so unique, compelling, or inventive that even those who would not glance at a gaming magazine can still find something of interest.

Unfortunately, there are some months when there is nothing out there that is, to steal from Steve Jobs, "Insanely Great." Sometimes I have to make do with games that are pretty good, but nothing really special.

This isn't one of those months.

This month brought two new games that threaten to carve out their own niches in the gaming industry. These products are interesting games by themselves, but they're also interesting for what they say about the gaming industry.

First up is *Everway* from Wizards of the Coast. Wizards of the Coast turned the game world on its ear with the release of the *Magic: The Gathering* card game. It's rare that a single product can be so clearly seen as the genesis of a whole new segment of gaming, but *Magic: The Gathering* has fostered the whole business of collectible card games—a business which has grown to fantastic proportions in only a few years.

While *Magic: The Gathering* continues to sell briskly, Wizards of the Coast is well aware of the danger of being a 'one product' company. They've bolstered their core product by extending it with a family of expansion packs. The immediate sellout that occurs following the release of each expansion shows the excitement that surrounds this product is still running high.

Wizards of the Coast is also behind the *Jihad* card game. Based around the *Vampire* role-playing system, *Jihad* has not been as successful as *Magic*. Which is not to say that it hasn't been a successful product, *Jihad* far outsells most of the collectible card games on the market. It's only a failure when compared to its spectacular sibling.

Some other Wizards of the Coast products include the humorous card game *The Great Dalmuti* and the innovative science fiction board game *RoboRally*. Both of these are genuinely fun games from some of the same hands that devised *Magic*.

But now Wizards of the Coast is trying its hand at the mother lode of fantasy gaming—a role-playing system. Its take on the venerable role-playing system is called *Everway*. This isn't Wizards of the Coast's first foray into role-playing. Back in the pre-*Magic: The Gathering* days, they were involved in a pair of role-playing systems. But those systems, while good, were still quite traditional in their structure and gameplay. *Everway* is anything but traditional.

In producing *Everway*, Wizards of the Coast has merged some of the concepts of collectible card games with those of role-playing to produce a hybrid system. Gone are the stacks of many-sided dice. In their place, cards act as the

Wizards of the Coast has produced distinctive role-playing cards with a dreamy, mystical quality that pervades the whole design of *Everway*.





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magicians, archers, and others. One side of these dice shows a portrait of the character represented. The other sides have one or more symbols representing the actions that character can take. Like collectible card games, *Dragon Dice* has common, uncommon, and rare character dice. Unlike a card game, it's quite easy to tell the rare dice from the declasser hordes—the rarer the dice, the larger the dice is. Rarer dice tend to have more powerful symbols and to have them in greater abundance; they dominate the battlefield in both size and strength.

How a game of *Dragon Dice* plays out involves a complex interaction among characters and terrain. Terrain settings determine what moves an army can make. In return, the maneuvering of an army can change the terrain conditions. At the distant archery setting, only arrows can reach your opponent. As the forces draw closer, melee with swords, clubs, and other short-range weapons begins. When the armies are face to face, the magic action begins, with spells flying and even dragons appearing to defend their allies.

The manner in which these battles are fought is the most satisfying part of the game—you lift one of three armies in your hand, give them a shake, and roll them across the table. The symbols revealed in the roll represent the value of attack and defense.

It's a simple method of conducting combat, but this apparent simplicity disguises some pretty sophisticated rules. Special symbols, generally on rarer dice, also allow instant magic in these combats. And then there are advantages that certain races have on certain terrains. And reserves. Defensive spells. It can all get pretty complex.

There's one point from the game documents that I heartily endorse: the only way to learn to play this game is to play it. Your first game may go on forever in a back and forth contest of "scratches." Then you learn to sling a little magic and the next game is over in a flash. Then you learn a little defense and the balance is back. By the time you've played it a dozen times, you'll be down to the subtleties.

The artwork that decorates the faces of the dice can be a little abstract. But considering the limitations of the media, the images are effective. Little touches—like the way the portraits are drawn from different sides—help you distinguish among the characters. *Dragon Dice* is an interesting, unique game. The swirling colors and distinctive designs work together to create attractive little objects.

Overall, *Dragon Dice* is a fun, fast-paced game. The rules may take awhile to learn, but once you have them down, it's like second nature. You can pitch this game down on the dinner table and fight a war between the leftovers. In addition to the dice in the basic pack, TSR is promising expansion sets which will contain monster dice of new sizes and some additions to the rules. I can't wait. They may only be a handful of dice, but this is an addictive little game. ♦

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THE KING

Continued from page 41

image of the prince, well and strong as he actually was, so that they might know he was not in truth slain.... In despite of the warning the wizards gave of the ardure of casting such a wreaking between the worlds, A-ron did so charge them. And thus was the wreaking conceived at his command and sent to soften the lamenting of all the Middle World.

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FROM THE MAGICKAL DIARY OF GABRIEL
Thorn, December 25, 1989

E. and Er-na were visiting this weekend.
It's been wonderful since they learned how
to correct for the time difference. What a
relief to know they were safe, and that I
hadn't failed them because of the simulacrum's disgracefully premature demise.

We had a barbecue on Saturday, and
Galatea got embarrassed when she realized
we were out of charcoal. (She's always a little
awe-struck in Er-na's presence.) E. asked
if he could go to the store with me. I said,
"You're supposed to be dead."

He said, "No one will recognize me—
remember how big the replica got before it
died? Besides, who'd believe them?"

We did get some odd looks at the Winn-
Dixie, but who cares? And best of all, E. told
me Galatea and I aren't the only ones expect-
ing. Such things take a little longer in
Alheim, but E. says he expects to be hauling
that old teddy-bear lullaby out of mothballs
real soon now. ♫

[Dedicated to Howard Waldrop and Thorfinn
Einarrson]

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DEUS TEX

Continued from page 58

the rain and jerked it away. And my imagination kicked in: The storm rocked and waned and surged as if he were orchestrating it. The thunder walked across the rooftops.

Rain poured in, and lightning fell all around us. Toxie stood in the middle of it, cautious, prudent, cagey, take-no-chances Toxie, drenched, wearing that god-awful grin, his face illuminated with flickering light, conducting the storm with his golden shaft.

It is the vision of him that I will take to my grave. That was how it was just before blue-white light caught the shaft, danced its length, connected Toxie to the eagle, and held him, held them both. The window exploded, and Toxie still laughed, laughed over the roar of the storm. A sound like a locomotive roared at the window. Then he was gone, and I was listening to the steady beat of the rain. What remained looked like an oversized charred sausage, steam pouring off blackened meat. The curtains were on fire and so was the carpet and a couple of cabinets. The shaft lay where it had fallen, unmarked.

Hatch let go of the axle, staggered to his feet, and backed away with a desperate look in his eyes. He ripped one of the curtains off the wall and tried to beat out the fire, but it was spreading too fast.

"Let's go," I said, heading for the elevator. "The place is going to burn down."

He tried a few more swings, gave up, and grabbed the Viking war helmet and the sundisk. "I can't believe this is happening," he gasped.

The fire spread fast. I kept my eyes off Toxie. Later I felt sorry for him, but at the moment it was hard to be too sympathetic to a guy who kept waving a metal pole at an electrical storm. The truth is, I couldn't get my mind off all the gold that we were about to lose.

I grabbed our two bags and threw them on the elevator and punched the button for the first floor. Nothing happened. I looked at the power indicator lamp. It was off. The electric candles were also out. "We'll have to use the stairs," I said.

We rolled the wheel back out onto the floor, but it was slowing us up too much. "Let it go," I said.

"Are you crazy, Cash?" He was almost in tears. "Do you have any idea what this thing is worth?" At that moment the silver staff with the crossed snakes caught his eye. But we had our hands full.

We navigated among the burning cases. At one point the wheel fell over and smashed the bellows. Hatch kicked the bellows out of the way and we righted the wheel again. By the time we got to the double doors the rear of the building was an inferno.

"It'll be easy to get it downstairs," he said,

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trying to laugh. He leaned it against the wall while I rattled first one doorknob and then the other.

"What's the matter now?" he demanded. "It's locked."

Sweat was pouring into his eyes. "I'd like to kill this guy Rankowski." He threw his shoulder against one door and bounced off. We tried it together, while I thought about what would happen to us if the doors came open. But they didn't. They had a little bit of give, and that was all. Smoke was becoming a serious problem, and I suspected we would smother before we burned.

"Wait a minute." I went back and retrieved the silver staff with the snakes. I jammed it between the doors and tried to lever them open. Hatch put his weight behind mine, but it wasn't working. The doors were probably being held shut by a ceiling bolt.

I had never seen Hatch scared before. His eyes were wide with terror, and I wasn't feeling so good myself. "We need something more," he grunted. He ran back into the cloud of roiling smoke and returned with the hammer. This was the big mallet with the flat rock attached to its business end.

He waved me out of the way and wound up with both hands, took his bead near the top of the doors where the bolt was, and swung the mallet in a long arc.

MONITORS AS FAR AWAY AS LOS ANGELES picked up the shock wave. CNN reported a Richter scale reading of five point seven. The epicenter was pinpointed as being just outside Pemberton. That was almost right. I suspect, if the sensors had been a little more precise, they would have baffled the watch officers by putting it on the third floor at 511 S. Eddy.

Our lights went out. Permanently, as it happened, for Hatch. They never found him, but I know he would not have gone off without a word, leaving his wife and kids and his many friends.

I woke up on a table with a sheet over my face. What brought me around, apparently, was a cop trying to pry the silver staff loose from my fingers. They told me later I had a death grip on it.

They also told me my heart had been stopped for two hours. I had been dead when I was brought in, dead when found. But these things happen, said a guy in a white jacket, obviously embarrassed.

The newspapers never reported any of the strange stuff that we found on that third floor. I guess the cops kept it for themselves.

Next time I saw the silver staff, it was in evidence at my trial. I don't know what happened to it after that. In a presentencing statement to the court, I suggested they take it down to the Briarson Memorial Hospital and hang it in the emergency room. The judge thought I was trying to make him look silly and gave me eighteen years.

Which meant, of course, that I was out by Christmas. *~*

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PACIFICA

Continued from page 55

address to Manu Pueo. Kahuna listened, and wondered, and grew afraid.

She spoke of the time when she gave birth to him, but the story was not as he had always heard it. Instead of a glorious tale of a dying owl who inhabited a boy's soul, he heard of an old and vain wife struggling to hold the affections of a husband who even then was fonder of his newer wives who could give him many children. He heard of an owl who swept through the coconut grove where his mother labored, frightening away the attendants but itself leaving just as quickly.

He listened as his mother pleaded with the owl spirit to forgive her for marking herself and coming back to the village with a son and a story, both false. Mele sat crying beside him on the sleeping mat and asked the owl spirit to come to her son now as she had deceitfully told the world it had done, so many harvests ago.

THERE IT WAS. KAHUNA WAS NO PROPHECY made holy by the spirit of an owl inside him. He was a man as any other, and less fortunate than most. His life had been a lie, and his prophecy—what could be said about his prophecy? It never existed except in his illusions. He could not account for the strange dream he had had while in the cavern, but he knew now that it was no more real than anything else he had seen when he thought he shared his soul with the owl.

Once he knew the truth, he also saw how he had been misled into believing he was a prophet. That first prophecy during his tenth makahiki was an accident, a cruel accident, for it created a belief among the villagers that was never again put to a proper test. Kahuna realized that he had been called upon to direct people's lives, but not necessarily to prophesy. Who was to say he was wrong when he told a couple to marry, for who saw the alternative? If a chief marched into battle on Kahuna's word, and it did not go well, shouldn't it be assumed that the carnage would have been worse had Kahuna's advice not been heeded? He was a fool, Kahuna saw now. He had been one of the very beginning.

Kahuna recovered from his illness, but did not utter another word of prophecy, though he continued to make small magics such as Kuokoa taught him. He lived well enough. Some people thought the owl left him when it was believed he would die; others contended that Kahuna was saving his strength for some great prophecy to come. But whatever they thought, they treated him well and allowed him his solitude.

He used that solitude to offer penance to the gods. Only occasionally did he contemplate how it might have been were he really a prophet and if he had had the power to truly cast the future. ♀

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Contributors.

TANITH LEE WENT TO ART COLLEGE and worked in various jobs as a library assistant, waitress, and clerk until DAW Books published *The Birthgrave* in 1976 and she became a full-time professional writer. She has published nearly 150 short stories. She lives near the sea with her husband, writer John Kariine, and a cat. Her third *Scrabble* novel, *Darkness*, is due from St. Martin's in 1996; *Overlook* is publishing *The Book of the Dolls*, her new *Paradise* book from which this story was excerpted; and her third and last *Unicorn* book will be delivered to Byron Press in spring 1996. Mary O'Keefe Young graduated from Parsons School of Design in New York City in 1982. Mary tries to create a magical quality with her watercolors by using dramatic light. Capturing the beauty of human expression is of prime importance in her work. A love of the natural world and art history is also evident in her artwork. Mary's studio is in her home in White Plains, New York. She enjoys using family or friends as models and dressing them up in costumes which she has collected or sewn herself.

Jack McDevitt has won the Philip K. Dick Special Award, and the UPC international prize for novellas. He has been nominated for the Nebula and the Hugo. His novels *A Talent for War* and *The Engines of God* have both been Locus bestsellers. HarperCollins recently published *Ancient Shores*. McDevitt has been a taxi driver, naval officer, English teacher, customs officer, and motivational trainer. He lives in Brunswick, Georgia, with his wife Maureen and his three children. Michael Dubisch made his first illustration sale to Fantaco's *Goshawk* #6 in 1987. He is a graduate of the School of Visual Arts, and his cartoons have appeared in every issue of *High Times* for a number of years.

Don Webb, editor of the "Sex, Magic and Literature" column in *AltX* magazine, has a collection of over a thousand grains of rice from different celebrity weddings. He is currently translating *The Bridges of Madison County* into Malayalam. Susan Wade lives in Austin, Texas, with too many books and no cats. Her short fiction has appeared in *Amazing Stories*, *F&SF*, and a number of *Datlow*, *Winding* original anthologies. Her first

novel, *Walking Rain*, is due from Bantam in 1996. She says she'd had a fragment of this story lying around for a while, but that it would never have taken off without the influence of the febrile, mythos-sodden imagination of Don Webb. Annie Lunsford has been freelancing since 1976. She won't reveal her age, only that she was "born after swing and before rock-and-roll." She has illustrated stories in *Science Fiction Age*.



Mary O'Keefe Young



Jack McDevitt

ROBERT SILVERBERG WAS BORN IN New York City and educated at Columbia University, though he's been a resident of the San Francisco Bay area for many years. He's the winner of four Hugos, five Nebulas, and most other science fiction honors for his uncounted number of short stories and over 100 books. For more of his science fiction, read *Robert Silverberg's Worlds of Wonder and Universe*. Web Bryant was part of the design team that created *USA Today*. Other achievements include art directing the first national children's newspaper *Pennywhistle Press* and creating national award-winning maps and graphics.

Jeanne Cavelos is the director of *Odyssey*, a new six-week summer fantasy writing workshop held on the campus of New Hampshire College. She also runs a freelance editing company and teaches writing, fantasy literature, and publishing at Saint Anselm College. Before moving to New Hampshire, Jeanne was a senior editor at Dell Publishing, where she launched the highly praised Abyss horror imprint, for which she won the World Fantasy Award. Julie A. Stevens is a legal aid attorney in Portland, Oregon. She has published short stories in *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Asimov's*, *Whispers*, *Science Fiction Age*, and several horror anthologies edited by Charles Grant. She has four adopted daughters, who are her excuses for not yet completing the novel she's been working on for years. Carol Heyer is represented by *Worlds of Wonder* for her science fiction and fantasy work. Her art is also found at Every Picture Tells a Story, the gallery in Beverly Hills that exclusively sells art from children's books. She is working on a cover for Hyperion's Disney Press, and another for Crippen and Landru. ♦



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